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## Daughters of Dundee: gender and politics in Dundee: the representation of women 1870-1997

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:  
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000e31e>

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# **Daughters of Dundee**

## **gender and politics in Dundee: the representation of women 1870-1997**

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**This thesis is presented to the Open University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy**

**June 2000**

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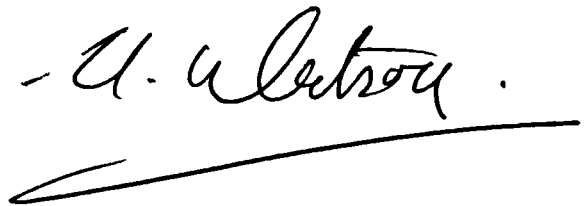
**DATE OF SUBMISSION : 28 JUNE 2000**

**DATE OF AWARD : 5 FEBRUARY 2000**

# DECLARATION

**I declare that, while registered as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with the Open University, I have not been a registered candidate for another university during the research programme, and that this work is my own work, and that none of this work has been submitted for another degree.**

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "U. U. Watson", followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**I offer my sincere thanks to Professor Alice Brown, Department of Politics, University of Edinburgh, for her guidance and support.**

**I dedicate this thesis to my late mother Alide Odilia Guerra.**



## **ABSTRACT**

**This thesis investigates to what degree women developed a politicised gender consciousness and participated in political activity in Dundee in the period 1870 to 1997. It is a gender and political study on Scotland's fourth city which has three key objectives. The first is to examine whether gender was relevant in the city's history of representation and whether it made a difference to political structures, policy and activity. The second charts the advance of women in the city's political elites to determine whether they shared common interests which formed the basis for collective action, which could be characterised as women's politics. The third sets out to further our understanding of why there is a commonly-held and repeated public view that Dundee was a woman's town and that Dundee women were and are in some way radically "different" because of the city's unique industrial circumstances and the intervention of gender into local political activity.**

**The thesis uses several sites to explore whether the women involved made a difference in terms of political outcomes. It examines parliamentary and local government elections. It looks at the emergence of trade unions, elected bodies and autonomous women's organisations. It involves an interdisciplinary exploration of issues and problems in political studies, political history, community politics and the analysis of gender relations. It is an idiographic study of gender and political activity that utilises new evidence to challenge myths associated with the object of analysis. It argues that the distinction between the voluntary welfare associations in which women were involved and political activity was often blurred. Influential women's activity which does not fall within conventional definitions of "political" activity is also highlighted.**

**The study seeks also to place these discourses within the context of theories about representation and equality. Within political science the thesis explores empirical explanations within the context of Dundee, and contends that analysis of the situation in the city during the study period, in particular the role of middle-class women in the 20th century, goes some way to providing a flexible alternative to important feminist approaches on political participation and representation. It is also argued in this thesis that time and place are important factors in charting representation, and that they are factors seldom prominent within feminist theoretical scholarship. Thus, this thesis is as much a first women's political history of a major Scottish city as it is an important analysis of political representation and a framework for establishing new ideas about political activity in Dundee. It provides an original contribution of a historically and socially-specific location and in so doing provides a basis for further comparative work on gender and political activity and in placing tacit assumptions in the research literature in question.**

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# **Gender and politics in Dundee: the representation of women 1870-1997**

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This thesis is an interdisciplinary exploration of issues and problems in political studies, political history, community politics and the analysis of gender relations. The research it contains was motivated by the questions noted below and it is sited against factors which impinge on women's access to and participation in political activity. It does so noting claims that "the pattern of women's representation in Scotland has been one of fluctuation around a low level" (Brown, 1998, p171). In terms of parliamentary representation, for example, just 24 women were elected to represent Scottish constituencies from 1918, when women received the franchise, to the general election of 1992, and according to Levy (1992, p59), "low levels of women's representation have gone hand in hand with low levels of interest in improving women's representation." Furthermore, very few women have been put forward for selection in Scotland (Brown, 1998, p174). Low figures of women's representation have also been recorded for local government elections by Barry (1991), Brown (1998) and by (Brown, Jones & Mackay, 1999). Although this picture of under-representation has altered in more recent elections, the thesis also identifies evidence that the unequal representation of women in conventional politics is mirrored by their lack of presence in other decision-making groups. It is against this backdrop of limited participation that Breitenbach argues that women are marginalised generally within Scottish history (1997, p82). Yet it is decidedly not the case that there were no women of influence.

In focusing on Dundee, this thesis asks questions about the role of women in shaping the political history in Scotland's fourth city from the last quarter of

the 19th century to the present era. How were they involved, and to what extent? What form did “political” activity take and who took it? Was political activity obscured by the nature of women’s work and their domestic role? If they organised, did Dundee women organise earlier or later than elsewhere because of the city’s “unique” industrialisation. The study seeks to place these questions within the context of popular theories about representation and equality. It also sets out to answer two key questions related to the complex arena of gender politics. The first concerns the reputation cited descriptively in popular and academic literature that Dundee women are “different” in some more radical way with regard to their political activity. Thus this investigation explores whether they are individually, collectively and peculiarly militant. In the light of research into party political representation by Burness (1992) and Brown and Galligan (1995), the second question explores the relevance of gender to women’s political experiences in Dundee and how it manifested itself in terms of formal political access and participation. Was it of substantive significance or merely symbolic?

Such questions are important in the light of the widely-perceived paucity of data on women’s politics in action in Scotland together with the general view that mainstream political science has traditionally viewed women as apolitical, or ascribed their experiences to be of lesser significance. Very little published research on women’s political activity in Scotland appeared prior to the 1990s when, supported by a burgeoning interest in women’s studies in academia and elsewhere, coupled to a transformatory period of politics in Scotland, the interest in women’s affairs grew exponentially.

Catriona Burness addressed parliamentary politics specifically in 1992 (*The Low Slow March*), categorically detailing levels of female under-representation in Scotland. She noted, for instance, that only eight individual women were returned as MPs for Scottish seats over the period from 1918 to 1945. Only 33 stood as candidates (p159). Burness concluded, in part, that the prospects of a

woman becoming a parliamentary candidate were slim but pointed out that the lack of women at Westminster had not appeared “to have been a burning issue over the period” (p169). She revealed numerous barriers in place preventing candidates coming forward and winning success at the polls, however. These included hostility towards women, low expectations of women in public life and the difficulty in gaining experience - factors significant in the context of this case study on Dundee. More recently (Waverly Paper, 1994), Alice Brown concluded that it could be argued that “women in particular are alienated from the Westminster Parliament because it is seen to be male dominated, hostile to women, run in a confrontational and aggressive style, and with procedures and times of conducting business which act as unnecessary barriers for women’s participation” (p7).

In a separate work in 1992 (*A Woman’s Place?*) Burness pointed out that women’s low level of representation had gone hand in hand with low levels of interest in improving women’s representation (p59). On a similar theme, Esther Breitenbach (1997) investigated women’s lack of visibility in political and public life in the 20th century and considered whether their under-representation leaves a legacy in which contemporary women have difficulty in creating a positive public identity for themselves. “Certainly we can say that so limited is our knowledge of the role of women in Scottish history that they do not appear to have influenced the creation of a notion of ‘national identity’ and that this is necessarily constructed in a masculine image.” (p88)

Fiona Mackay used data on political representation and activity in her 1996 thesis to pose and answer a series of theoretical question about the “numerical under-representation of women.” She asks about political relevance in political elites and, indeed, why gender is relevant to women’s experiences. Are politicians first and foremost politicians, for example? Mackay concludes that gender intervenes in a complex way in women’s “access, presence and action” in political elites. She contends that a fuller understanding of gender and politi-



cal elites has been “frustrated” by what she terms the dominant empirical approaches which focus on measuring observable differences between female and male politicians. Of specific interest to this case study from Mackay’s research is whether women share common interests as political actors.

To facilitate this investigation into the development of a politicised gender consciousness it was considered important to investigate one of the key political movements of female solidarity and one of the main foci of the history of British feminism, the campaign to win parliamentary votes for women. In this area Martin Pugh’s (1992) research looked at the movement nationally, but Leah Leneman (1991, 1995) has dealt specifically with the suffrage period in Scotland and the little-known Scottish women in the votes-for-women movement. Her work reflected the lack of published material on this important movement, as well as some of the problems women faced; for example, the choice between constitutional and unconstitutional action. Different aspects of the suffrage period, which had a bearing on the Dundee case study, were explored by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris (1978, 1994). These authors revealed that Lancashire women had been politically active throughout the 19th century in local politics and trade unions (p9). They noted interesting connections between the suffrage movement and labour organisations, and, importantly, between the suffrage movement and working women (p20). Various aspects of this work bore scrutiny given Dundee’s experience as a major female textiles employer, not least their claim that when the fellowship which existed in textiles mills was organised into trade unions it “gave the tens of thousand of women weavers their political muscle” (p95).

Working women was the focus of Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach’s work, *The World is Ill-Divided - Women’s Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (1990) and Gordon’s *Women in the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914* (1990). Although the Victorian period marked the virtual exclusion of working women from the realm of political elites, these

authors traced the evolution of a political consciousness among working women in Scotland and its “distinctive potential for companionship” (Gordon & Breitenbach p23). But, “in short” they concluded, “they were seen as an ideal weapon in the hands of employers” (p63). The largely-female Dundee workforce, however, was prone to challenging many notions of normality, and in *Women’s Spheres* (1990) Eleanor Gordon concludes that although women occupied subordinate positions in the workplace, “this did not prevent them from organising to protect and improve their wages and conditions” (p223).

How best women’s representation in decision-making bodies is achieved and how best women can promote their goals inside or outside formal politics has been considered by several researchers. And, since representation is an integral theme of this thesis, it drew upon a number of areas of recent work, including Brown & Galligan (1995), Myers & Brown (1997), Innes (1998) and Brown, Jones & Mackay (1999). Perhaps Brown, with McCrone and Paterson in *Politics and Society in Scotland* (1998, p181) best summed up the position of women in Scotland: “The whole political culture and the way in which politics is conducted is perceived as a disincentive to women’s participation and a subtle way of excluding women from the political process.”

### **Dundee’s ‘unique’ characteristics**

Dundee has been chosen as a focus for this study for several reasons. Firstly it underwent a unique industrialisation and urbanisation during the period examined and analysed in this work, namely from 1870 to 1997; secondly this industrialisation involved female labour to a considerable and arguably unique extent; and thirdly, the city’s social history has been largely neglected, particularly its 20th century history, and specifically its political evolution. In addition, a wide range and wealth of primary sources was identified and analysed for the first time.

In focusing on one city, however, is to forego any opportunity to make an extensive comparative study. While women's political role remains to be revealed in many communities, and while political theorists question the limited role of women in public life, it was felt, however, that the experiences of a major city such as Dundee should not be omitted from the pages of Scottish social and political history. Furthermore, the local setting has an important impact on political aspirations and attitudes, not least in Dundee, a working-class city held in the grip of a single industry for upwards of a century. In this industrial setting, local environment has a bearing and influenced individual behaviour. Thus, this thesis is as much a first women's political history of a major Scottish city as it is an important analysis of political representation and a framework for establishing new ideas about political activity in Dundee.

The perception that Dundee is a "woman's town" has endured since its transformation into Britain's foremost jute centre in the 19th century. By 1872, it was "King Jute" with 70 mills and 40,000 textile workers, 30,000 of them women and girls. Because of rapid industrialisation Dundee's population grew steadily in the decades before and after 1871 (See Table One). This marked the beginning of a period of industrial unrest. Between 1870 and 1880 there were 46 strikes within the jute and linen industries in Dundee alone, accompanying a period of erratic wage movement (Johnstone, 1974, p314). Because of this peak of industrial activity, the year 1870 has been used as a pragmatic starting point for this thesis. 1. There were also changes to women's avenues of representation at this time. There was an extension to suffrage in 1868. Unmarried women could participate in some local elections if they had the appropriate property qualifications (Carter, 1992, p6). Women in Dundee, as elsewhere, were allowed to stand for School Boards from 1870. Householder

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1. The decade beginning with 1870 also witnessed a great deal of physical change in Dundee, as the implementation of the 1871 Improvement Act, which comprised 20 improvement schemes, brought the clearance of many slum areas and the creation of new civic buildings. A new city library was opened in 1870, a museum in 1873, for example, and several new streets were laid out.

details appeared in the Census of Scotland from 1871 allowing an opportunity to scrutinise areas of social deprivation. And this work was carried out with due diligence apparently: “In Scotland in 1871, of the 8,342 numerators employed, only one had to be prosecuted for making false returns” (Census for Scotland, 1871, p1). That Census also launched the model schedule used in subsequent Census reports which listed some of the personal categories with which we are familiar today. The Public Health Act of 1872 established sanitary authorities and Medical Officers of Health who reported to them annually. Thus 1870 is a pragmatic and appropriate launching ground for the detailed analysis to be covered by this study.

In order to place the discussion of women’s roles in context it is necessary to provide a fuller profile of Dundee itself. Population data is a useful starting point in that population trends can reflect the changing nature of employment, the social philosophy and political thinking in a city. The population of a setting is also a useful indicator as to the opportunities for employment in that place. Table One below sets out the changes in Dundee’s overall population from the mid-nineteenth century:

**TABLE ONE**

Population in thousands of Scotland’s cities: 1851 to 1961

	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>1851</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>2,889</b>
<b>1881</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>3,736</b>
<b>1911</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>4,761</b>
<b>1931</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>1,088</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>4,843</b>
<b>1951</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>1,090</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>5,096</b>
<b>1961</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>1,055</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>5,179</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, various (percentages below my own).

Table One shows the rise in population in Dundee between 1851 and 1881,

when at 44% it grew faster than Aberdeen, 22%, and Edinburgh, 35%, and almost double that of the population of Scotland as a whole (23%). According to Graham Ogilvie (*Herald*, 6.6.1998) Dundee was “the most rapidly urbanised city in Britain” at this time, and to Joe Doherty (1992, p26) the city had grown “from a fledgling industrial town of 79,000 to a designated City of some 160,000.” In the decades afterwards, Dundee’s population grew at a slower pace and held at a relatively steady level until the post-war era when it increased rapidly once more.

It is also significant that women outnumbered men in Dundee’s population during the period. Between the ages of 20 and 40 there were almost three women to every two men in the city (M.L.Walker, 1912, p69). In 1921 among the population aged 15 years and upwards, females outnumbered males by 19,041 or 36.9% (Census, 1921). The significance of this factor will be discussed in Chapter Two. Employment, like population, is a key criterion in characterising a community. Table Two below shows the diversification breakdown of industries in the four Scottish cities in 1881 and 1911, acknowledging that Census reports make strict comparisons difficult.

**TABLE TWO**

Employment distribution as a percentage of total occupied population.

		Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Aberdeen
<b>In Extractive</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>5.3</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>13.9</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>33.9</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>66.7</b>	<b>32.4</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>36.4</b>
<b>In Service</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>50.0</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>60.0</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>45.5</b>
<b>Unclassified</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>10.9</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.3</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1881 & 1911: Extractive industries include mining, quarrying, fishing, etc, service industries include transport, construction, public utilities, public administration and professional services.

Table Two shows that Dundee's industrial make-up over the period was radically different from other Scottish cities. Between the dates shown, two thirds of the occupied population in Dundee was engaged in manufacturing industries, compared to less than one third in Edinburgh, and around one third in Aberdeen, the latter city vying at the time with Dundee for the status as Scotland's third city.

It is worth noting that Dundee had a far greater percentage occupied in manufacturing for both years, 66% and 66.7% against 49.2% and 48% in Glasgow, which is often described as "Second City of the Empire" at this time as much because of its cotton-led manufacturing base as its population size. In Service industries, Table Two shows a relatively high percentage of the total occupied population engaged in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, 64% and 50% respectively in 1881, while only around a quarter of Dundee's workforce was engaged in the sector. 1.

Table Two demonstrates that the size of the manufacturing sector in Dundee contrasted from that in the other cities at these dates. From this data, and from Table Three, we can sense the importance of the textiles industry, principally jute, to Dundee over the same 30 years.

### **TABLE THREE**

Textile Employment as a percentage of total occupied population.

	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>1881</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>8.3</b>
<b>1911</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>6.9</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1881 and 1911.

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1. Aberdeen's relatively high figure for extractive industries is accounted for by its fishing industry.

By 1881, the one-time strength of Dundee's flax and linen sectors had been overtaken by jute imported raw from the Indian sub-continent and processed into products such as sacking and flooring, which required the full employment of one in two of the working population in the city. <sup>1</sup> This contrasts with, for example, Edinburgh, which had a negligible textiles industry of less than one per cent in 1881. Textiles, principally jute, accounted for just under 50% of the total occupied population in Dundee as early as 1867, and its importance as the city's staple industry did not perceptibly decline until the Second World War. Another significant contrast becomes evident when female employment in the Scottish cities is compared.

#### **TABLE FOUR**

Women as a percentage of the total occupied population, by city.

	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>1881</b>	<b>45. 6</b>	<b>35. 8</b>	<b>33. 4</b>	<b>35. 7</b>
<b>1911</b>	<b>43. 7</b>	<b>37. 1</b>	<b>30. 6</b>	<b>33. 5</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1881 and 1911.

Table Four serves to confirm that, over the period, Dundee had a much higher proportion of working women than other Scottish cities, and 15% more than in Scotland as a whole. Furthermore, the city's women and girls were engaged in work very different from contemporaries in the other cities. As Table Five overleaf shows, the most striking feature about employment in Dundee was the extent to which the city depended on women to operate its dominant industry.

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**1. The total imports of raw jute to Dundee was 123,000 tons in 1872, rising to 273,000 tons in 1883 and reaching a peak around 400,000 tons before the First World War (Annual jute statistics, *Dundee Yearbooks*).**

**TABLE FIVE**

Distribution of female industrial employment as a % of total occupied females.

		<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>In Extractive</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>0. 1</b>	<b>0. 7</b>	<b>0. 2</b>	<b>1. 1</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>0. 1</b>	<b>0. 5</b>	<b>0. 2</b>	<b>6. 3</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>84. 5</b>	<b>26. 0</b>	<b>59. 9</b>	<b>40. 0</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>77. 9</b>	<b>29. 3</b>	<b>49. 1</b>	<b>41. 7</b>
<b>In Service</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>14. 6</b>	<b>70. 6</b>	<b>35. 3</b>	<b>50. 3</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>21. 1</b>	<b>66. 2</b>	<b>47. 8</b>	<b>49. 4</b>
<b>Unclassified</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>0. 9</b>	<b>2. 7</b>	<b>4. 7</b>	<b>8. 4</b>
<b>Industries</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>0. 8</b>	<b>4. 0</b>	<b>3. 0</b>	<b>2. 7</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1881 & 1911.

Table Five indicates that Dundee's large female workforce took part in manufacturing industries to a much greater extent than in any other Scottish city and were employed to a much lesser extent in other industries. In 1881, for example, over eight out of ten occupied women in the city worked in the manufacturing sector, compared to fewer than three out of ten in Edinburgh and three out of ten in Aberdeen. (Glasgow's high showing is partly accounted for by the numbers of women employed in the cotton trade.) When the number of employees involved in textiles was examined for a different industrial era - 1921 and 1931 - a picture is painted of a city in which women were occupied in a single industry on a massive scale well into the 20th century.

**TABLE SIX**

Numbers of female textile workers in Scottish cities, 1921 and 1931, by city.

	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>1921</b>	<b>22,969</b>	<b>1,460</b>	<b>10,641</b>	<b>2, 829</b>
<b>1931</b>	<b>21,932</b>	<b>1,136</b>	<b>9,133</b>	<b>2, 274</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1921 and 1931.

Note: aged 12 and over in 1921, 14 and over in 1931.



A further important dimension throughout the period examined was that Dundee was most unusual in that married women made up a sizeable proportion of its workforce. No marriage bar existed in the jute industry. In 1911, when statistics for the occupations of married women were first included in Census data, the Dundee textiles industry occupied 5,639 married women, or, around 30% of those gainfully employed. This contrasted markedly with the other Scottish cities, and Scotland as a whole, and was a situation which continued well in the 20th century as Table Seven illustrates.

## **TABLE SEVEN**

Numbers of married women employed in textiles, 1921 and 1931.

	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>1921</b>	<b>6,080</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>1,253</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>1931</b>	<b>8,584</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>1,293</b>	<b>180</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1921 and 1931

From the data in Tables Six and Seven it can be established that around 30% of all women involved in the textiles industry in Dundee were married, compared to a norm of between around 2% and 12% elsewhere in Scotland and, according to Klein (1965, p9) about 12% across the UK as a whole. Even in 1931, when the jute industry was in decline, married women formed nearly 25% of all females in work in Dundee, when the national average for Scotland was around 5%. 1. By 1951, when the industrial picture of Scotland as well as Dundee was changing, and by which time several large electronics companies had entered the city under dispersal of industry legislation, the percentage of women workers in Dundee remained greatly in excess of any other major city. Table Eight overleaf clearly demonstrates this trend.

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1. It is worth noting Census figures for other occupations in Dundee: for example, there were no married female journalists, no married female librarians, none in social welfare, none in chemical production and only eight in transport. By 1951, the percentage of gainfully employed married women in Scotland had increased over 1931 (there was no Census in 1941) by 27.8%, much greater than the 5.2% by which the population of Scotland increased in the same period (Census, 1951).

**TABLE EIGHT:**

Proportion of female population aged 15 and over employed in Scotland as %.

	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>1931</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>39.8</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>36.9</b>
<b>1951</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>33.2</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1931 & 1951.

In fact, by 1951, Dundee still retained a higher proportion of females employed than any city, burgh or town in Scotland. It also continued to have more married women in employment than anywhere else in Scotland, the Census Report that year commenting: "In the cities, the percentage was easily highest in Dundee where no fewer than 30.6% in gainful employment were married women."

With regard to domestic conditions in Dundee, it has been asserted that living conditions were arguably worse in Dundee than in any other Scottish city for much of this study period. 1. Table Nine, below, reflects the Census standard for overcrowding and shows that conditions in Dundee were indeed worse than for the other Scottish cities.

**TABLE NINE:**

Percentage of population living more than two persons to a room, by city.  
in houses of less than five rooms

<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>49.2</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>37.7</b>

Source: Dundee Social Union, 1905.

The 1905 survey and report into housing conditions and inner-city life by Dundee Social Union, which was largely entrusted to two women, Mary Lily

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1. Whatley (1992, p12) has called 19th century industrial Dundee "the closest Scottish equivalent to Charles Dickens' part-mythical Coketown," and that it was "little wonder" that crime and disease flourished.

Walker of Dundee and Mona Wilson of London, also showed that 63.1% of the population of Dundee lived in one or two-roomed houses. Of the 18,252 persons living in a one-roomed house, Walker and Wilson found that 62% were living more than two to a room. In other words, adding to this building picture of Dundee is a severe element of domestic overcrowding. 1.

To summarise, Tables One to Nine inclusive provide a valuable description of some of the economic and social factors which made Dundee such a unique industrial centre in the late 19th and 20th centuries which, in themselves, may have been the catalyst for political mobilisation or militancy. The city underwent rapid growth in the period which coincided with a dramatic rise of a massive textiles industry based on jute spinning and weaving. The most striking feature of employment was the extent to which textiles dominated. A further marked contrast with other cities was the way its single industry was dominated by female labour - a much higher proportion than anywhere else. Within that, what was particularly unusual was the extent that married women remained in the workforce. 2. But besides these statistical factors, which led the British Association in 1912 to describe Dundee as "pre-eminently a city of women and of women workers," this thesis begins with a premise that most modern historians and commentators define Dundee as a woman's town in a different, harder-to-measure way.

Various published comments give the impression that behavioural distinctness is a possibility. It is an impression perpetuated by today's writers. As recently as 1999, for instance, Elaine Harrison commented, "Dundee has long been

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1. Dundee also had, according to the 1911 Census, the highest proportion of women householders in any Scottish town, 12,000 out of 37,000. This phenomenon will be referred to in later chapters.

2. An alternative manner in which to emphasise Dundee's difference in female working patterns with other Scottish cities is to cite numbers employed in domestic service - for example, just seven per cent of Dundee's female work force in 1881, compared to 44% in Edinburgh.

noted as a city with a powerful and committed female population" (*Evening Telegraph*, 14.5.1999). Such comments are steeped in the city's historical traditions. William Walker noted (1979, p16), "From the 1870s, observers remained convinced that Dundee was different in that behaviour which was perhaps to be expected in working class men, was unnatural and unacceptable in women and youths." They (Dundee women) were "rough, raucous and vulgar," according to Ajay Close, "Dundee women are strong, gallus and an inspiration to their sex. Today, as in the past, Dundee women are different" (*A Woman's Place*, SoS, 1.3.1994). Writer Ellie Macdonald said of them, "Vociferous, sure and dominant. Qualities which are echoed in the women's movement today" (*Dundee Women Odyssey*, 1990). Chris Whatley has commented, "More than any of the other Scottish cities, Dundee was a woman's town" (1992, p19).

More recently this perception of Dundee women has been given a darker slant as the distinctive background of Dundee working women, identified in the foregoing, has been used to explain different social trends. In explaining why Dundee was "harder hit than many other cities in Scotland and England" in respect of shoplifting, Alistair Jack, manager of Boots the Chemist, and a member of the Dundee City Centre Action Group, claimed, "Dundee has a very high percentage of working female population compared to males and I believe the social conditions have encouraged this type of crime." The distinctive character of Dundee women is responsible, said Brian Pendreigh (*Scotsman*, 6.3.1995), for sex being one of the city's three "plus points" along with location and cost of living. "A lot of women came to Dundee to work in the jute mills...the women are used to taking charge, so the argument goes, and they still are." Pendreigh also linked the town's jute industry to the high percentage of "gynslip pregnancies" seen in the city. On a more positive note, the women of Dundee have been described as politically "different" - a concept which has excited feminist scholarship and one which is central to this thesis. In his address to the 79th Scottish conference of the Labour Party in Dundee in March 1994, the then Lord Provost of Dundee Tom McDonald claimed that

Dundee women had a proud radical history “born out of the injustice suffered by the jute workers, who provided the wealth at the turn of the century. It is important to note,” he told delegates, “that it was the women of Dundee who were at the forefront of the struggle to organise” (*Evening Telegraph*, 11.3.1994). Addressing the Scottish Trades Union 97th annual congress in Dundee in April 1994 the STUC president Harry McLevy told delegates: “From the role that the Dundee women played in the suffragette movement, to the solidarity of the Dundee workers with the struggles of the workers around the world, the people of this city have always set the finest example for the movement” (*Courier*, 19.4.1994).

According to William Walker (1979, p45) the presence of large numbers of mill girls in Dundee “gave a frenetic quality to the social and political life in the city.” Walker claimed that such was female political power in the early 20th century that, “jointly” with the Prohibitionists, “they helped to destroy the influence of the Liberal Party,” which had dominated Dundee’s two-member constituency since it was created a parliamentary burgh in 1832.

The pioneering role played by Dundee women in the evolution of Scottish trade unionism was recorded by J.T. Ward (1979) and, according to Graham Ogilvy (*Herald*, 7.9.98), “the archetypal ‘strong Dundee woman’ is often cited as a unique result of the phenomenon of a largely female workforce long before the advent of modern feminism.” Moreover, in Lorraine Walsh’s work on public philanthropy (2000, p1), it was noted that, “Women workers in Dundee created a strong and vital workplace community which was seen as setting them apart from women workers elsewhere.”

In recent times, the women at the centre of the acrimonious Timex industrial dispute in Dundee in 1993 were described by *The Times* as “the witches of Dundee” (6.6.1994). It was Dundee women who tormented Dundee MP Winston Churchill in the early years of the century, recalled Jack Webster (*Herald*,

9.6.1993), and “now the granddaughters of those doughty dames are to be found at Timex.” Ogilvy added (ibid), “Dundee women certainly did provide the economic backbone of many working-class families and echoes of their determination can be seen in episodes like the Timex dispute.” And, as the dispute, where four of every five on strike were women, dragged on, Ian Bell seemed to convey the view of many: “Dundee women are like no other” (*Observer*, 20.6.1993).

Therefore, while there is statistical data from the National Census which points to gender peculiarities in Dundee in terms of population, in terms of work and in the type of work done, there is also, apparently, a willingness to make claims of Dundee’s women which paint a complex picture of a shared militant characteristic. This key point is explored in the thesis in an attempt to test the view that Dundee’s women were, after all, different in their political activity.

To this end, the thesis examines and assesses three broad categories of women’s political activity in Dundee, namely elected party and non-party political organisations, trade union organisations and welfare and autonomous women’s organisations. Thus, in addition to the participation of women in the formal political arena, much of the study concerns the largely-unrecorded post-suffrage years. Here, the thesis examines in detail the welfare agenda set by community-conscious women’s bodies in Dundee in response to changing social and political circumstances. It is recognised from the outset, however, that the concept of a collective gender consciousness is flexible and liable to interpretation because of the feminist theory which moulds it.

The study of gender within political science is therefore discussed now, allowing a fuller understanding of women’s everyday position within political elites to be made, and providing a link between wider feminist scholarship and the areas and institutions of local political activity highlighted in the text.

## **Feminist theory**

“Feminism” is a contested concept, but it is a term normally associated with the analysis and actions established to break down male dominance in society, which is viewed as oppressive. Lovenduski and Randall (1995, p2) describe it as “all ideologies, activities and policies whose goal it is to remove discrimination against women” - and as a refusal to accept the “inevitability” of inequalities between men and women. A useful definition of the term “theory” comes from the feminist writer Charlotte Bunch. According to Bunch (1986, p172) theory allows us to see the immediate needs in terms of “long-range goals” and an overall perspective. “It thus gives us a framework for evaluating various strategies in both the long and the short run, and for seeing the types of changes that they are likely to produce.”

The term “feminist theory” generally suggests insights, understanding and knowledge which offers critical explanation of women’s subordination (Richardson, 1993, p50); that is, it offers analysis and explanations as to how women’s lives are experienced and lived. It is not an unengaged critique of women, however. Its dynamic purpose is to end women’s oppression. As feminist writers have shown (Stacey, 1993, p50; Humm, 1992, p55) feminist theory has a specific relationship to political movements. For two centuries at least, feminist theory, harnessing women’s experiences and definitions of sameness and difference, have been the basis for what Jackie Stacey calls “radical activism” (ibid) and have become the force behind a desire for change.

Although categorisation should be approached with caution, given that complex theories cannot be neatly compartmentalised, “first-wave” feminism, which developed in the late 19th and early 20th century in Britain, and elsewhere, fuelled a belief that women had a common interest in challenging male oppressors, and it attempted to account for women’s subordination in society. Pre-dated and bolstered by what Humm (1992, p54) identifies as a growth in “women’s employment, in women’s entry into higher education and an increase

in rates of divorce,” first-wave feminists, who featured in groups such as the Women’s Co-operative Guild and the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, involved themselves in public campaigns to win equal rights in areas such as representation, pay and promotional opportunity. Ray Strachey (1887-1940) was one first-wave activist who dedicated her career to promoting equal rights for women. She revealed that:

“...the meetings, which multiplied in halls and drawing rooms, in schools and street chapels, at street corners, and on village greens, did not seem like the dull and solemn stuff of politics; they were missionary meetings, filled with the fervour of a gospel, and each one brought new enthusiasts to the ranks. It was the flowering time of the Women’s Movement.”

*(The Cause, 1928, p37)*

According to writers - such as Sheila Rowbotham (1992, p121) - first-wave feminists debated arguments over whether women should be viewed as a sexually and economically vulnerable section of society (and one which should therefore be given special protection in the home and workplace), or whether the drive should be directed towards individual equal rights. As other sympathisers with these views re-questioned the dichotomous divide of women as an entity, or whether a recognition of various forms of difference should be accommodated, the philosophical unity over combating oppression was eventually divided by political and theoretical differences among pioneering feminists.

Again approaching categorisation with caution, the three major feminist theories to emerge were: Liberal feminism, whose supporters Lovenduski and Norris (1995, p65) locate “in the Labour Party, in the professions, and in mainstream women’s organisations,” and who took the view that male oppression could be challenged if socially-constructed legal, political and social obstacles to equality between the sexes were removed. Liberal feminism was distinctive in its focus on individual rights and choices which were denied to women and wished to integrate women into all public institutions on the basis



of equal opportunity - its key goal. "Accordingly, they concentrate their efforts on obtaining legal and procedural changes to eliminate unfair discrimination against women" (ibid). Marxist feminists perpetuated theories that women's oppression is tied to capitalist exploitation of labour, in particular that the sexual division of labour and women's exploitation within the system was tied to a world divided into two distinct classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. "From this perspective," says Valerie Bryson (1992, p3), "the key to women's liberation is their entry into the paid labour market and their participation in the class struggle." Radical feminists, a third mainstream group of theorists, focused on men's control of women's sexuality and reproduction and male violence against women. Simply, men as a group subordinate women as a group.

Vicky Randall (1982, pp5-7) provides a useful snapshot of the philosophical characteristics of these important perspectives: liberal feminists seek to achieve their goals through non-revolutionary, low-profile lobbying; Marxist feminists seek to lift women's oppression through Marxist ideology, that is, by replacing the capitalist economic system with communism; while radical feminists, accepting that men will not give up their power over women, believe there should be no compromise with them. Similarly, Sylvia Walby (1990, pp4-5) highlights some of the problems associated with the competing theoretical perspectives, namely: that liberal feminism can be criticised for its failure to deal with the "deep-rootedness" of gender inequality; that Marxist feminism is too narrowly focused on capitalism (being unable, for instance, to deal with gender inequality in pre- and post-capitalist societies); and that radical feminists have a tendency to a false universalism. In the years covered by this study these "classic" theoretical perspectives have been viewed increasingly as over rigid.

The main theoretical approaches described above use concepts of "political," "public/private" and "power" in different ways. Given the context of the thesis - namely investigating representation and levels of political activity within institutional practices - it is important to gauge the relative importance and

influence of these terms in sustaining patterns of male power and female subordination, as feminists see them, and their impact on the case study of Dundee. In the writings of Liberal theorists, women are servitors of the “private” realm; the ideology of domesticity defining their place as full-time wives and mothers in the private sphere of the family. In this sense, women’s “political service” to the State is viewed largely in terms of motherhood. This does not signify a retreat from the “public” sphere of formal politics, however. If politics is a power-based interaction, then arguably it is too diverse a concept to be categorised within the tightly-constrained boundaries of party politics. Potentially, therefore, women’s purposeful activity and influence are not confined to decision-making spheres. For example, in highlighting small collective groups, radical campaigns and direct action, the thesis identifies power-based interactions within institutions outside formal politics in which female values and attributes act to transform the local polity. However, as the notion of “biological fate” determines many women’s future roles and careers, it is argued that they are less likely to engage in such activity. Feminists have outlined studies which explore the effects of this socialisation of women into traditional roles which alienates them from political activity. Another consequence is that motherhood can obstruct the development of political activity.

Radical feminists, who postulate classification by sex as “the earliest and most important division in society (Evans, 1993, p112), and see the conflict between men and women as the fundamental power relation in society, challenge the idea that politics does not take place in the private sphere of the household. They argue that politics is essentially about power “which need be neither observable nor confined to a public arena” (Lovenduski & Randall, 1993. p5). However, it has also been argued that participation in the paid workforce does change women’s political awareness and aspirations. According to Marxist feminism, women’s paid and unpaid (household) work is analysed in relation to its function within the capitalist economy. Thus Marxist feminists view the family as only partially privatised. For them it remains an apparatus for

maintaining the hegemony of the male ruling class. In seeking to remove women from the domestic realm, this theoretical approach also challenges the public-private distinction. By connecting these issues of reproduction and production, second-wave feminism acted to change political thinking.

“Second wave” feminism gained momentum through research from around 1970 based loosely around the American-conceived slogan, “the personal is political,” the rise of the Women’s Liberation Movement, and equalising directives from the European Community. It helped shift the emphasis from first-wave feminism’s totalising theory of universal equality to a firmer scrutiny of separatist strategies of women’s liberation; a new ‘postmodern’ concept in which “criticism floats free of any universalistic theoretical ground” (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990, p21). Through this new thinking, the three classic feminist standpoints were increasingly questioned. In discussing what she calls “false universalism” Judith Evans (1995, p30) questioned the goal of equal opportunity posited by liberal feminists: “Given that liberal feminists characteristically speak of equality of opportunity rather than condition, then it might be said that they uphold an unequal society and simply want to advance women within its ranks.” Thus women’s horizons, in distinctive theoretical terms as well as the practical application of political scholarship, continued to widen.

By the 1980s, the academic feminist critique that women’s progress against oppression was built around a shared interest or identity, had given way to a recognition of a diversity of needs and experiences shaping new theoretical analysis over a broad canvas of issues. For instance, while first-wave feminism grew around women-wide demands for suffrage and equal opportunity, more-recent feminist thought attacks universalism and, as Susan Bordo (1990, p135) points out, is more explicit: “Feminist criticism has turned to its own narratives, finding them reductionist, totalizing, inadequately nuanced, valorizing of gender difference, unconsciously racist, and elitist.” Sylvia Walby (1990, p15) is less emotive: “Analyses based on a dichotomy between ‘women’

and 'men' necessarily suffer from the flaw of essentialism. Instead, there are considered to be a number of overlapping, cross-cutting discourses of femininities and masculinities which are historically and culturally variable."

Since the 1980s, feminist discourse - the analysis of relations between men and women, but now more than ever the sameness or difference *between* women - has been shaped by what Bock and James (1992, p1) refer to as "the controversial debate surrounding the conceptual couple 'equality and difference'." There is a strong distinction between these important feminist concepts. Difference theorists think in terms of women being different to men, such as in childbirth and in women's roles in the family, and in terms of the difference between sub-groups of women, such as those mediated by race, class, ethnicity and age. Because women and men are seen as essentially different, and do not exist in a world in which women are subject to male-defined values and institutions, this theory has potential consequences in the pursuit of legal rights and equal opportunities. Those supporting the difference theory see *difference* as the root of women's opportunity. They believe, for example, that women's biological capacity to give birth helps them to embody qualities which can lead to a higher understanding than male consciousness.

The equality theory is based on the notion of treating people alike - equal rights, equal pay, equality at work, and so on. It assumes that, apart from their biological difference, women do not differ from men in any fundamental or significant way. It looks for an equal and level playing field on which women can compete. Equality theorists believe women should aspire to full inclusion into existing social, economic and political structures. Thus "difference" is something to be overcome in a gender-neutral society. These concepts are important to feminist study. Carole Pateman (1992, p17) says, "The feminist movement and feminist scholarship are frequently seen as divided between the advocates of equality on the one side and the advocates of sexual difference on the other....some feminists are presented as demanding equality in the

sense of identical treatment of men and women, and others as demanding that the distinctive characteristics and activities of women should be given special consideration." According to Susan James and Gisela Bock (1992 pp1-3), "Equality and difference are "deeply ingrained in western discourse on gender relations...(and are)...concepts which continue to shift in response to fresh political and theoretical interests and evolving strategic opportunities." But Pateman (1992, p10) argues that women can be equal or different, but not both - a major point of discussion in this study, particularly in the focus on non-elected post-suffrage groups in Chapter Six. As notions of women as a unitary category were supplanted and feminist political thinking changed, the "personal" and "political" were linked in second-wave feminism.

Humm (1992, p55) identified second-wave feminism's "single most important" feature as its challenge to traditional political concepts. Politics is therefore another term requiring definition. In its traditional sense, it is often defined as purposeful activity and decision-making confined to the public sphere. In Scotland, for instance, the political arena might normally be seen in the context of local and national government. Many feminists have challenged this "narrow" understanding on the grounds that inequality and subordination are problems of political power, and insist it should be questioned. The broadening is normally done on the basis that if politics is about power, then home is a harbour of power relations. Pateman (ibid, p19) suggests that women's political standing rests on a major paradox; "they have been excluded and included on the basis of the very same capacities and attributes." In terms of exclusion, women's rich variety of values, actions and activities have been implicitly marginalised and regarded outside the political world of citizenship until comparatively recent times. Insofar as that has changed, policies often associated with women's perspective, for example, with regard to pensions, housing and unemployment, have become conceptually important in modern formal politics. There is a blurring of traditional conflicts between treating women as independent citizens and categorising them primarily as wives and mothers. Yet clas-

sic feminist theory agrees that the notion of “patriarchy” is central to women’s subordination and as it is a recurring theme in this study of Dundee, it also requires explanation. Once used to describe the power of the father as head of the household, patriarchy is a term used by feminists in connection with “the systematic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination” (Stacey, 1993, p53). Patriarchy developed as a theoretical concept at the beginning of second-wave feminism, notably, points out Vicky Randall (1982, p5), for radical feminists who argued that the sexual division of labour was underpinned by systematic male dominance - or patriarchy. 1. In Sylvia Walby’s key text on patriarchy (1990) it is argued that the concept is “indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality” ... and essential... “to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women’s subordination” (pp1-2). She defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (ibid, p20). Walby charted a move from what she defines as “private” patriarchy which took place in Victorian homes, to a form of “public” patriarchy in the employment/state arenas in modern times (pp20 & 24). In describing the activity of political parties, elected bodies and community-conscious women’s groups, the thesis shows not only how different styles of political behaviour predominated at different levels, but how the notion of patriarchy gives a conceptual form to the systematic nature of male dominance in society.

### **Theory and political representation**

There are some obvious discrepancies between the political, economic and social circumstances in place at the time which marks the start of this study and at its end which could influence women’s equal presence in the polity of Dundee. In terms of parliamentary politics, for example, the chronology of the

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1. In her celebrated feminist book, *Sexual Politics* (1970) Kate Millet launched the word’s use as a catch-all for masculine oppression “Our society, like all other historical civilisations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance - in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police - is entirely in male hands.”

thesis passes through distinctive landmarks such as voting rights for some women over 21, to universal suffrage, towards present-day arguments over gender discrimination and quotas. Thus it is important to site this investigation against a background of factors over these years which may or may not have inhibited women in Dundee from taking part in political activity.

In terms of formal representation, for example, Pippa Norris (1985, p95), identified “three hurdles” crucial to women’s election to political bodies. One, they must be willing to stand; two, they must be judged suitable and selected by a party selectorate; and three, they must be supported by the voters. These are useful factors for examining representation generally. Taking the first *hurdle*, there is a traditional view, as espoused by Jane Jaquette (1974, p5), that women are uninterested in, or apathetic towards, any involvement in politics. In citing this view, Carol Mueller (1988, p20) claimed that all that advances in representation - such as the suffrage success - have achieved is the “symbolic goal” of constitutional representation. Catriona Burness (1992, p169) also claimed that the lack of women at Westminster did not “seem to have been a burning issue over the period. The great triumph was the winning of votes.”

Outwith formal politics, April Carter (1987, p96) quoted two Mori polls in 1976 and 1979 which indicated that in the trades unions at least, “women were less likely to attend branch meetings, to vote in union elections, to go on strike or to join pickets than men, and more likely to take no part at all in union activity.” Even where women were dominant in numbers in powerful unions, such as in the Lancashire textile organisations, Jill Liddington and Jill Norris (1994, p96) claimed that the great majority of women.... “just paid their dues and left union organisation to the men. Few of them ever went along to a union meeting.” Some political theorists have taken issue with this notion of apathy, however. Vicky Randall pointed out that “relatively few” women fail to achieve political representation because they lacked motivation, but more importantly because there were specific constraints on their freedom to do so.

Randall claimed that women were “not inevitably apolitical: they can get involved in politics when its concerns and mechanisms are accessible to them” (Randall, 1987, p80). Women, argued Randall (ibid, p130), in not putting themselves forward for office, may be little more than anticipating the “obstacles” to a political career.

In Scotland, for example, domestic responsibilities have been viewed as the major barrier to women’s participation in politics. Various writers (Burness, 1992, p65, Brown, 1998, p35) have cited domestic responsibilities inhibiting women from putting themselves forward for election. This was perhaps the case at periods in which a strong social pressure on women to aspire to femininity and domesticity existed, with the obvious ramifications that it justified inequalities in the workplace, gave women little chance of developing a career, and led to claims that women were less motivated to work hard.

The lack of provision in child care at Westminster is perhaps a more recent example of those barriers. More so, in Scotland’s case, geographical isolation and parliamentary hours have been seen as factors preventing a larger number of women attempting to seek selection or election to Westminster. Prior to the creation of the Scottish Parliament, Brown and Galligan (1995) made the point: “The possibility of a parliament based in Scotland is seen, therefore, as one way of removing at least some of the practical ‘systematic’ barriers currently faced by women.”

The second *hurdle* identified by Norris is that women must be judged suitable candidates.

Table Ten below lists the number of women candidates and the number of women elected from 1918, when women received the franchise and the right to stand for election, until the war-time general election of 1945.



**TABLE TEN: Women candidates & women elected, Scotland, 1918-45**

Year	Women candidates	Total Elected	% of total MPs
1918	1	nil	nil
1922	3	nil	nil
1923	3	1	1.35
1924	6	1	1.35
1929	9	2	2.7
1931	10	3	4.05
1935	9	2	2.7
1945	8	3	4.05

Source: Burness, 1992, pp 160 & 161

Clearly there were very few Scottish women MPs elected over the period indicated in Table Ten and this inevitably reflects the low number of women candidates selected to stand. “Nor was there any apparent Scottish parallel with the efforts of Norwegian and Swedish women in the late 1920s to improve women’s representation by fielding women candidates” (Burness, 1992, p161). The political party stage is an important element before the electorate enter into the parliamentary process and the findings reported by Burness, and others, suggest that the major political parties were ambivalent over selecting women as candidates - although she recorded that Labour were less likely for the period to put forward women as candidates, and the Unionists more likely. Brown (1998, p178) identifies “barriers to women’s involvement” at party political level - such as: “party rules and organisation, the timing of meetings” - while the Fawcett Society reported (1996, p25) that “over half of UK women consider national politicians as the group lending least support to women” and that, during elections, issues of concern to women slipped off the political agenda.

Satisfying selection requirements, procedures and criteria has proven difficult in the past for prospective women candidates for a number of reasons. Women have faced situational constraints in areas such as occupational or educational opportunities. Women do not, for example, fill senior posts in most professional or academic fora (EnGender Audit, 1996-98). Historically in Scotland,

there has been a tiny minority of women “captains” of industry, trade union or local government leaders - the traditional reservoirs of political recruitment (ibid). Consequently, as Catriona Burness has identified (1992, p59), there is an assumption that a lack of confidence and experience play a part to prevent more women taking part in political activity. She also asserts (p169) that political parties north of the border have been preoccupied with winning women’s votes, rather than providing the electorate with women to vote for.

The third *hurdle* identified by Norris is support by the electorate. The possibility of women candidates being seen as vote losers by the electorate has been debated for some time. Norris states (1985, p95) that perceptions of women as vote losers within a party selectorate mean that female electoral prospects would also be viewed as doubtful. April Carter (1992, pp 39&45) claims that prejudices against women at parliamentary level raise doubts within selection committees about the capacity of women to be effective, which reinforces the notion that women do not put themselves forward because there is little point in doing so. But Randall cites studies which indicate the possibility of women being “liabilities” but which conclude that this is likely to have a “marginal/negligible” impact on polling day. In their excellent study of political recruitment, Norris & Lovenduski (1995) raise this possibility: “There may be ‘discouraged aspirants’ who never put their name forward for consideration or to party lists, since they anticipate being unsuccessful.” They qualify this by pointing to evidence, contained in the 1992 British Candidate Survey (BCS), which suggested “little discrimination” and, indeed, point out that some members believed women were vote winners.

Another debated issue is the potential of a women’s block vote and whether women in power necessarily support women’s interests. “Second-wave” feminist Jane Jaquette (1974, p5) suggested “great implications” for any tendency for women to vote as a cohesive block. Carol Mueller (1988, p16), however, states that the anticipation of a women’s voting block has “failed to materialise

since the vote was won” while Jackson and Jones, more recently (1998 p8), concluded that “the idea of women as a unified collectivity is no longer tenable.” In terms of women in power, Alice Brown states (1998, p172) that “even those women who were elected to Parliament did not see their role as including the advocacy of equal representation for women or advancing women’s interests.” However, my examination of the support of the electorate in the victories in Dundee of first Edwin Scrymgeour in 1922 and then Florence Horsbrugh in 1931 raises the possibility that the increasing numbers of women legislated to vote had significant impact on representation, and that Horsbrugh fully played the gender card, both as a prospective candidate and as an elected Member.

For the reasons above - primarily *Norris’s hurdles* - we can see factors in play to hold back women from political activity and these will be important to bear in mind in this study which seeks to measure political activity and representation. The hurdles parallel to some degree what Norris and Lovenduski (1995, p15) describe as motivation and resource factors which affect recruitment, and elements of Burness’s work on Scottish “barriers” to political representation, as well as Brown and Galligan’s findings on gender consensus politics. Together it offers a rich theoretical background to a focus on a city where women played a unique role in industrialisation and urbanisation. The next section will place some of the relevant factors from feminist theory into the context of the Dundee case study in order to establish the criteria and conditions under which the thesis will test for political activity.

### **Theory and representation in Dundee**

According to Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, (1998 p8) feminists have been “keen to question the dichotomies between theory on one hand and activism, experience and research on the other.” In seeking answers to this feminists have attempted to establish connections between theory and their understand-

ing of women's lives: "If feminist theory is to retain its political relevance, it must continue to make sense to women in terms of everyday knowledges and practices" (ibid). In progressing this line of questioning, and seeking to explain why these authors, among others, believe that "theory is no use if it has no relationship to the actualities of life as lived," it is important to conduct a study which makes women visible and recovers and reconstructs their history. Breitenbach (1997, p83) has raised women's lack of visibility in Scottish narratives and June Hannam (1993, p305) has pointed out, "...women's contribution to the development of social, economic and political change has been marginalised through their absence from mainstream historical studies."

Viewed in the context of Dundee's social and economical development, some of the previously described feminist theoretical perspectives usefully fit - but others do not. Theorists might discover much to interest them in Dundee in terms of the concept of domestic patriarchy. For example, this study launches from the year 1870, a time when the Victorian division of roles and spheres - men as breadwinners and decision-makers in the public sphere, women as home-makers in the private sphere - and notions of what constituted masculinity and femininity, had considerable influence and impact. This division is relevant in that it had "a long-lasting influence on the lives of women up to the present day, and on the interpretations of historians" (Hannam, 1993 p315).

However the overriding "structure" which dominated local gender relations was arguably economic subordination. No city engaged women in employment as Dundee did and, for Scotland, as early as Dundee did. But the belief that the basis of male power in patriarchal capitalism is men's control over women's labour within both the family and the labour market, as defined by Anne Witz (in Richardson & Robinson, 1993, p297), will be demonstrated to be less a feminist keystone in the case of a rapidly industrialising city whose unemployed men were nicknamed "kettleboilers." Dundee was home to around 30,000 low-paid women textile workers over much of the period studied. This

statistic alone heightens the notion that women's oppression, as Marxist feminists might argue, was prioritised by class. But this inevitably raises theoretical problems in that role reversals in Dundee were commonplace as women formed the majority of "breadwinners." John Goldthorpe (in Walby, 1990 p8) argues that women can be ignored for the purposes of class analysis because their position is determined by that of the man with whom they live, either husband or father. This can be challenged in Dundee's case. The city's unique industrialisation (see above), often meant there was no male breadwinner.

The class differences which existed in an urban, rapidly-industrialising community are central to much of this study. In some respects, less similarity between middle-class and working-class women was evident, than between, for example, the troubled experiences of the working class generally. Yet the evidence shows that in their public work, middle-class women - certainly first-wave feminists - tended to focus on working-class problems.

Would-be political activists emerged slowly into the mainstream. The study will seek to demonstrate, for example, a gradual increase, rather than a post-suffrage rush, in numbers of women willing to be selected as candidates for parliamentary and local government elections, and as elected members on bodies such as Dundee Parish Council and School Board. But active women often chose other pathways towards common goals, for example, as members of Dundee Social Union, Dundee Women Citizens' Association, church groups, Soroptomists and other organisations who rallied in pursuit of feminist aims. The unveiling of such participation meets a main thesis investigation within a broad theoretical perspective. Although the city's working women occupied subordinate roles, they also did not lack resolve and the evidence shows that many fostered the ideology of feminism. But the change from Walby's private to public patriarchy is notably a factor... "patriarchal values were deep rooted in industrial communities" (Dickson & Treble, 1992, p150). And women's work in Scotland was "generally low status; women's labour power was underval-

ued, and choices of employment remained severely constrained into a small cluster of sex-stereotyped occupations” (Corr, 1992, p151).

In looking at the activity of women in Dundee over the study period we can also see much to recommend both the equality and difference feminist perspectives and not to view them as antithetical, as Joan Scott found (1992, p18); “If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unobtainable.” The Dundee inter-war women’s movement proved itself by overcoming gender differences in an environment of masculine values in a patriarchal local state, while, on the other hand, involving itself in a range of equality and welfare concerns which were typical of women’s distinctly citizenly responsibilities.

That differences existed in the first place sits comfortably with the argument espoused by “difference” feminists that sex difference, whether the result of biological factors or as a result of socialisation, is relevant to issues of equality, and that equality (as it stands) disadvantages women. Where difference feminists see equality in form if not fact, is, for example, in types of welfare work. If equality with men is “irrecoverable,” perhaps because men’s needs are different, or more because these needs are perceived as somehow “natural,” then women can pursue a distinct and separate culture based on perhaps their reproductive roles and natural caring instincts. Thus, for example, the members of the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association, while shrinking away at first from formal political fora, busily involved themselves in acts of social improvement in areas such as housing and education, with specific reference to the conditions found in Dundee at the time. Conversely, it is evident that they often pursued equal standing and equitable representation in otherwise male-dominated activities and organisations, which undermines liberal theorists’ notions that female difference is “invisible in the public sphere” (Bock & James, 1992, p5). The membership of the DWCA, then, provide evidence of women who repeatedly blurred the divisions and distinctions in competing feminist theories.

## **The thesis framework**

Theoretical perspectives described above are premised on the need to explain and to understand the causes of oppression, as much as to seek avenues of politicisation. The themes highlighted in the subsequent chapters should also be seen against wider theoretical approaches but are used to explain women's distinctive contribution in Dundee and to determine the nature and extent of political activity there. The chapters, detailed in brief below, discuss the role of Dundee women and trace female political representation and grass roots activism, community and welfare involvement and networking across a range of group activities to test evidence of local activism against theory and perception.

In terms of parliamentary representation - the focus of **Chapter 2** - various studies, (Burness, 1992, p65, also referred to in Brown, 1998, p35) showed domestic responsibilities inhibiting women from putting themselves forward for election. In Dundee's case, there is also evidence to support the notion of political disinterest among women raised by the feminist writers noted above. For example, the national suffrage leaders Theresa Billington and Christabel Pankhurst singularly failed to rally women to their cause during visits to Dundee in 1906, even though the second-wave feminist Carol Mueller (1988, p18), discovered "great expectation" in the suffrage period that potential women voters would serve as a lever to help bring about transformation. Thus, a key investigation approached in this chapter, through a detailed inspection of contemporary records and reports, examines whether the push for votes was focused on middle-class or professional women, as in other cities, or whether Dundee's huge population of working women played a prominent role. Chapter Two also examines the city's political history in some depth and charts parliamentary elections over the study period. In doing so it sets out to establish whether women as women, using women's concerns, played a collective role in the changing pattern of formal political representation in Dundee.

One aspect which helped to reveal a hitherto suppressed feminine dimension of public life was the emergence of activist women in local government. As discussed in **Chapter 3**, some women ratepayers were permitted to take part in local authority elections as early as the 1880s, although they could not be elected to town councils until 1907 (Carter, 1992, p6). But their importance as a forum for progressive politics was asserted by Lovenduski and Randall (1995, p20): "Local government has been a major, if not THE major arena of change in the composition and attitudes of local Labour leaderships." Sheila Rowbotham (1992, p136) claims local government provides a context in which middle-class socialist women could exert pressure for the redistribution of public resources towards women and children ... "this combined democracy and social need, but tended to shift the argument about the changes necessary for women's emancipation away from the unequal relations within the working class to the wider social inequalities that a combination of class and gender created."

But what acted in Dundee's case to prevent, for instance, a woman taking a seat in the city chambers before 1935, when the legislation that allowed them to do so, as well as the precedent elsewhere, had existed for two decades? In his 1992 study of women in local government Jim Barry cites Hollis (*Women in English Local Government 1865-1914*), who had reviewed the role of women on parishes, vestries, boards and councils of English local government, and had noted how, "Philanthropic women and suffrage women.... converged in late Victorian England on local government" (Barry, p38). Barry's conclusion that the barriers confronting women's involvement in local government were the "selection by political party, lack of confidence, and responsibility for domestic labour and child care" (ibid, p200) is tested in Chapter Three. The chapter also examines whether the women who were eventually elected in Dundee had a bearing on political activity in terms of presence and action. In seeking to answer such questions an examination of current thinking on local government representation and under-representation is included.



Much of the evidence contained in this thesis and in **Chapter 4** in particular reflects upon the specific conditions in Dundee brought about by the textiles industry and the difficulties of political organisation which faced the low-paid, largely-female workforce. Susan James noted (1992, p54), "Some women, by virtue of their gender, are faced with a choice between destitution and economic independence. For the destitute, political participation is not usually a practical possibility. For the dependent, it is under the control of the paymaster."

Using available contemporary records Chapter Four investigates the impact of Dundee's unique industrialisation and, bearing Susan James's comments in mind, looks for signs of political participation among its female workforce. It seeks evidence for Eleanor Gordon's assertion that "only in textiles would there have been any real potential for women to develop trade union muscle" (1991, p102). This will necessarily apply Dundee's circumstances to the debate over whether, as Elizabeth Roberts (1988, p72) argues, women in general "took a minor part in the management of most unions" with the rank and file "generally apathetic," or whether the experiences of women's waged labour in Dundee, and women's propensity to withdraw it, is substantive evidence of the need to reappraise this view. How important was gender itself in determining whether the city's women organised earlier, later, or in a different way from other industrial centres?

Feminist writers have pointed to the fact that many of the jobs undertaken by women in the public sphere were typical of work in the home - for example, cleaning and washing - and consequently genuine opportunities to become involved in formal politics were probably severely curtailed. Consequently, women normally had limited expectations from work and concentrated their ambitions on marriage and motherhood and domesticity - "a vicious circle was established, such that women's disadvantage in the labour market constrained them into dependence on marriage for survival" (Jackson, 1998, p18). Martin

Pugh also asserted the inevitability of leaving work on marriage:

“While work outside the home was a normal part of life experience for working-class girls, nothing changed their long-term goals or expectations. Work was an interlude before and during marriage, but no more than that.”

(Pugh, 1992, p22)

Dundee, however, lacked the presence of the traditional assumption that a woman's future meant marriage and children - if for no other reason than females heavily outnumbered males in the population. This chapter, therefore, explores whether the removal of this “barrier” to political activity impacted on what actually happened in the workplace.

Turning to childbirth, Cavarero (1992, p41), referring to the “established conditions of productivity at all costs,” states that, in industry, pregnancy is “a stumbling block to be avoided, a career obstacle, a vertical drop in productivity.” In Dundee many working women avoided pregnancy by avoiding partners, or, indeed, by failing to secure a husband through the overwhelming imbalance of eligible men in the population. Others had children virtually where they stood and carried on working for fear of losing their jobs. Furthermore, responsibility for children in Dundee was never as clear cut, and no significant evidence will be shown in Dundee's experience to substantiate Randall's view that situational constraints, such as the responsibility for children, were barriers to politicisation. In the early years of the 20th century, indeed, the city's School Board, which contained women members by this time, sent more children under 12 to work, via school exemptions “than did Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Govan and Paisley combined” (Walker, 1979, p82). 1.

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1. These children became the city's notorious “half-timers.”

This is sufficient cause to accept much of how a Marxist feminist would see women's exclusion from political power as due to economic aspects of oppression. Supporters of Marxist feminism insist on the primacy of the class struggle, where women form an underclass in terms of low status, low wages and lack of political influence. This could certainly describe Dundee as it industrialised rapidly in the second half of the 19th century.

On the other hand, economic prudence and independence among Dundee's working women is evident, where the typical scenario of a dominant wife controlling a working man's paypacket was superseded by a distinct lack of social pressure on women to aspire to domesticity. <sup>1</sup> This was due entirely to the presence of thousands of independent female wage earners, with Dundee possessing, according to Dundee Social Union in 1905, more single women households than any other city in Scotland - some 12,000 out of a total of 37,000 that year. The evidence assembled in this section provides a challenge to other histories of women in textiles, and the preponderance of claims that they were economically destitute.

**Chapter 5** examines female intervention in the local state - another way in which they were active - and places it within the wider framework of feminist action, political activity and community policy. Gradually, women became involved in equal opportunity politics, and the fora which offered them the electoral opportunity were School Boards and Parish Councils. The chapter traces their role and record in these important and influential bodies and enters the debate between the 'old' feminists - such as Ray Strachey - who wanted to end protective legislation, and 'new' feminists, such as Eleanor Rathbone, who campaigned vigorously to enhance the role of motherhood in the family. It will be shown through the activities of these organisations that

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1. This challenges the traditional interpretation in that Dundee's mill workers were the "breadwinners" in many households.

elected women made a significant difference to political structures in Dundee - and political outcomes. For example, women members on education, health and parish boards in Dundee promoted and prioritised issues with a distinctly female agenda, such as one-bedroomed housing for the city's single women. Indeed, as far as Dundee is concerned, it might be concluded that the political "awakening" of the city's women took place within the role and remit of these powerful elected bodies.

The emergence in Dundee of influential women's organisations is an important element of the 20th century feminist movement and **Chapter 6** serves to demonstrate that women campaigners in Dundee, in a host of community and welfare organisations and loosely networked groups, regarded their activities as purposeful and important and together formulated activity taken on women's behalf or by women which might be defined "political." Jane Hannam (1993, p306) says of these women generally: "By taking part in committees and negotiating with politicians, they provided a salient example for those who argued that women had a valuable contribution to make to the public sphere."

While dispelling doubts over their capacity to be effective, a further area of interest to this chapter was whether women's participation in autonomous bodies in Dundee was linked to the fact that the city had a female wage-earning workforce ahead of its time in terms of scale and numbers. Thus female intervention in the local state is fully examined in this chapter and placed within the wider framework of feminist action and political activity.

A key thread which runs through this work is the dependance of Dundee's women on the textiles industry, particularly jute. **Chapter 7** shifts the thesis focus into the present-day era. Firstly it breaks new ground by using contemporary records and extensive Press coverage to record the mass transfer of women from textiles to electronics as jute spinning and weaving declined. It

traces how the women took to new companies setting up in the city after the Second World War as advance factories and advantageous conditions attracted American and other new investment; household-name companies such as NCR and Timex, who eventually employed many thousands of women. It examines whether patterns of the 19th century workplace correspond to those in the 20th century. By looking for political activity the chapter tests whether women who perhaps failed to capitalise politically on a dominant position in the city's jute mills and factories, fared better in an era which coincided with electoral franchisement and advances in employment and wages legislation.

Throughout the thesis, therefore, the chapters show that the traditional polarisation of men with the workplace and wage, and women with domesticity and the family became uniquely blurred in Dundee. Indeed, an important element in this entire work is the focus on Dundee, a case study which allows an appropriate site in which to locate complex theoretical perspectives and to test them against emerging political activity.

## **Sources and Methods**

In terms of methodology, the thesis strived to interpret and present research systematically within the overall objective of seeking evidence of women's participation in political activity in Dundee. This encompassed dealing at some length with the specific topic of women's political activity, explaining the background to feminist theory and placing Dundee in the wider context of current academic debate. The thesis, therefore, builds through chapters which articulate the issues and answers researchable questions over the study period, to reach a conclusion in which findings are presented. In doing so, it attempts to discover through investigation whether or not the evidence supports certain assumptions made about Dundee women and their participation in political

activity. In order to answer the questions set out in the chapters, a number of authentic primary texts have been consulted in addition to much contemporary data and archival material.

Uppermost among these was the *Census for Scotland*. The *Census* is regarded by Drake and Finegan (1994, p24) as “undoubtedly the most important source for family and community historians.” Access to copies held in the University of Dundee Library and Dundee Central Libraries allowed research involving population categories such as gender, marital status and occupation.

Of particular use for the period around 1900 was the far-reaching report by women inspectors of Dundee Social Union into housing conditions in Dundee, which provided by way of an extremely large survey of over 6,000 homes a very accurate social snapshot of a densely-populated working-class area. This proved to be a key text in showing women’s role and relevancy in an influential decision-making institution. Further social information was gleaned from an unpublished and undated thesis (c1902) by Dr David Lennox, now housed in the University of St Andrews Library, although much of this work is of a complex medical nature.

Surviving political party records relating to Dundee were extremely difficult to locate (see MacDougall, *Labour Records in Scotland*). William Walker, in fact, noted that it was only thanks to the ever-watchful Liberal-supporting *Dundee Advertiser* and Conservative-supporting *Dundee Courier* that we have faithful accounts of the activities of these parties in the city. It was fortunate, however, to access Prohibition Party records from the first decades of the 20th century, boxed but unindexed, in the Central Library Dundee, and also some records of the Dundee Women’s Liberal Association housed in Dundee City Archives covering the period 1900 to 1946. Records and annual reports relating to Dundee School Board and Dundee Parish Council were more plentiful and covered the duration of their existence. These provided significant background data on the

women selected and their subsequent activities.

The Dundee newspapers generally were found to be an underrated source. The long-established firms of John Leng and D.C. Thomson, later combined as D.C. Thomson & Co, employed shorthand reporters to cover events and reported extensively and accurately on current affairs throughout the study period. Dundee newspapers, therefore, were of particular importance in periods such as the suffrage campaign, when their coverage conveyed the women's energetic commitment. It was borne in mind throughout, however, that newspaper proprietors and editors have their own interests and agenda. This was obvious in the terse exchange between Thomson and Winston Churchill in 1922, described in Chapter Two.

The inter-war period of study uses much previously unanalysed primary source material, notably the Executive Committee minutes of Dundee Women Citizens' Association, a rich seam of information on activities of a post-suffrage women's organisation which was recently deposited in Dundee City Council Archives. These comprehensive records provided a marvellous glimpse into the activities of a post-suffrage women's organisation and can now be compared to the findings of Dr Sue Innes (in 1998) on the activities of Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association. 1.

The history and conditions in the textiles industry is revealed in considerable detail in a Royal Commission report of 1890 which subjected to inquiry various people connected with the industry. This source was particularly useful in describing features of employment, and allowed a fuller understanding of women's overwhelming numerical presence in Dundee. The city's jute history between 1885 and 1923 is ably recorded and analysed by the late William Walker, a history lecturer at the University of Dundee, and the researcher

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**1. Scope exists for a Scotland-wide study of this national women's organisation.**

largely responsible for alleging that 19th and 20th century mill women practised infanticide. Walker's work is particularly useful taken with the primary source archive of the Jute & Flax Workers' Union and raises important questions over the effectiveness of textile trade unions, bearing in mind Drake and Finegan's comment (1994, p86) that "The trade unions' past struggles and achievements has not been matched by a propensity to preserve their records. In short, surviving records are patchy." The single failure of Walker's work is perhaps its heavy concentration on the bitter personal rivalry between the Jute and Flax Workers' Union male president and secretary.

In terms of relevant secondary source material for this period, Dundee's social diversity is illustrated by various authors in the Third Statistical Account which was usefully published only in 1979, some 10 years after another guide to the city by the British Association drew together several notable academics. A particularly good social picture of 19th and 20th century Dundee is painted in special articles in the *Dundee Yearbook*, published by John Leng & Co up to 1916. The British Association's *Handbook and Guide to Dundee & District*, 1912, which featured articles by academics and historians, provided further useful data.

For the modern era, it was fortunate indeed to have the first public access to records and annual reports of the Soroptomist organisation in Dundee, and access to the Lord Provost's New Industry Committee meeting minutes, 1947-53, which provided an invaluable insight into the post-war expansion in the city. But, of the new industries in Dundee, only the National Cash Register Company has published a history, to mark its 50th anniversary in Dundee in 1998. This concerns itself with the mechanics of company performance over those years, as well as some company background. Thus, there is room for much additional published research into the socio-economic fabric of 20th century Dundee.



It can be said with some confidence, indeed, that Dundee's Victorian and earlier history is more thoroughly recorded than that of the city's modern-day affairs. *Dundee, A Voyage of Discovery*, published in September 1999, provided a record of some 20th century themes and events, and superseded a slim volume by the Abertay Historical Society, *The Remaking of Juteopolis* (1990), published to commemorate the city's Octocentenary, as well as Billy Kay's anthology of the same year which had the same purpose.

More general secondary sources included Brown, McCrone & Paterson's *Politics and Society in Scotland* (1998) which provided an excellent summing up of women's representation in the mid-to-late 20th century, while the background to barriers confronting women's access to political activity is comprehensively covered in *Political Recruitment* (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

The history of working women and the Labour movement in Scotland has been dealt with by Eleanor Gordon in 1991, though here it is taken only to 1914, and also by Breitenbach and Gordon's *Out of Bounds, Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945* (1992). The suffrage movement in Scotland has been covered by Leah Leneman (1991) and, locally, by my book on Dundee's suffragettes a year earlier. A wider perspective of the votes-for-women movement is given in Jill Norris and Jill Liddington's *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (1978) and invites comparisons with events in the Lancashire cotton towns. Party politics and representational performance in Scotland have been usefully encapsulated by Catriona Burness, whose work (1992 especially), helped to highlight the paucity of women MPs in Scotland, and it was placed into a modern context by Alice Brown's paper *Plans for a Scottish Parliament: Did women make a difference?* (1994) which, along with other work (with Galligan in 1995, and with Mackay and Jones for The Rowntree Foundation in 1998) goes some way towards redressing the neglect suffered by women's political history in Scotland generally.

Together, the analyses of these sources, along with the testimony of several interviewees who were, in particular, required to bridge the gap between the jute and electronics industrial eras, along with others who proved useful in detailing activities within autonomous women's organisations, and to whom thanks are due, provide evidence which allows this thesis to address the "difference" of Dundee's numerically-superior female population and to repair this "neglect" by testing for political activity. In choosing a case study approach in doing so, which facilitated interaction with various local sources and materials, it furthers our understanding of the relationship between Dundee's unique circumstances, political structures and the backcloth of feminist thought on gender relations, while providing an original contribution of a historically and socially-specific location, and in so doing provides a basis for further comparative work on gender and political activity and in placing tacit assumptions in the research literature in question.

In its detailed conclusion the thesis usefully finds that gender was of substantive political relevance, as Dundee women established an energetic political agenda which included addressing a raft of social and welfare concerns, many of them impacting as much on decision-making elites as on the city's massive force of working women. And if difference was a recurring motive - not least in the often-polarised activity of middle-class and working-women - feminist goals were often shared.

## **Chapter Two**

# **Politics and parliamentary representation in Dundee**

### **Introduction**

According to Southgate (1968, p347), the “only really surprising result” in the parliamentary elections held in Dundee between 1900 and 1945 “is that of 1931.” As we shall see below, the 1931 General Election returned Conservative Florence Horsbrugh by a comfortable majority. This chapter will argue that this was partly due to the expanded female electorate voting as a cohesive block, when, with nearly 20,000 unemployed in a predominantly working-class city, and Labour councillors elected in ten of the twelve municipal electoral wards, it would have been more likely for a Labour candidate to have taken the seat. Thus it agrees with Southgate, but in a new context, introducing the gender dimension to the political explanation he put forward. And, while Dundee followed a typical parliamentary path until 1900, consistently returning two Liberal MPs and then predominantly Labour MPs after 1900, it can be shown that the General Election of 1922 was as equally “surprising” as that of 1931, since it marked the election to Parliament from Dundee of Britain’s only Prohibitionist Party MP. Again, the chapter argues that the women of Dundee played a significant role in this event.

Thus Chapter Two will examine women’s role, relevancy and performance as voters and candidates in parliamentary and municipal elections in Dundee

over the study period, bearing in mind that, as William Walker pointed out in his 1979 work *Juteopolis*, “With the exception of the Prohibitionists, who knew they were making history, none of the political parties in Dundee took trouble to preserve an account of their work. In the case of the Liberals and Tories, the neglect is less serious for they were served by the Dundee newspapers” (1979, p229).

Notwithstanding, this chapter will use empirical evidence and a range of historical materials to demonstrate new and significant knowledge about women’s participation in elections and the formal political arena in Dundee. Florence Horsbrugh’s candidature and election will be dealt with in full, as will Edwin Scrymgeour’s unlikely victory in 1922, while an over-arching aim will be to develop consistent links throughout with feminist theory.

### **Parliamentary politics: background**

From the Reform Acts of 1867-8, roughly the starting point of this study, to 1945, Dundee returned two members to Parliament to account for the extension of the male franchise and the city’s rapidly-increasing population. Whereas the town was a single-member constituency at the election of 1865, with an electorate of 2,895, two years later it returned two Liberal candidates in a constituency of 14,779 voters. 1.

From 1868, each elector in the city had two votes which could not be given to the same candidate. The two-member system had the effect of “plumping” whereby electors voted for a second candidate. After 1918, this system was rare in Britain (Southgate, 1968, p348).

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1. Ironically, by 1935 a poll of 44,457 was not nearly big enough to earn a seat in the House of Commons.

Election results for the remainder of the century were as follows:

**TABLE ONE: Dundee City Parliamentary elections, 1868-1900**

(those elected in **bold**)

<b>1868, Nov 19.</b>	<b>Electorate 14,779</b>	<b>1888, Feb 16,</b>	<b>Electorate 16,613</b>
<b>Lib. George Armitstead</b> , merchant.	7738	(on the resignation of Mr Lacaita)	
<b>Lib. Sir John Ogilvy</b> ,	7661	<b>Lib. J.F.B. Firth</b> , London	7856
Lib. James Alex. Guthrie, London.	3548	Un. Sir H. Dermot-Daly	4217
Un. Harry Warren Scott of Ancrum.	2085		
<b>1873, Aug 7,</b>	<b>Electorate 16,652</b>	<b>1889, Sept 25,</b>	<b>Electorate 16,780</b>
(on the resignation of Mr Armitstead)		(On the death of Mr Firth)	
<b>Lib. James Yeaman</b> of Craigie,	5297	<b>Lib. John Leng</b>	Unopp.
Lib. Edward Jenkins, author.	4010		
Lib. James Fitzjames Stephen QC	1086	<b>1892, July 5,</b>	<b>Electorate 18,214</b>
<b>1874, Feb 7,</b>	<b>Electorate, 17,814</b>	<b>Lib. John Leng</b>	8484
<b>Lib. James Yeaman</b>	6595	<b>Lib. Edmund Robertson</b>	8191
<b>Lib. Edward Jenkins</b>	6048	Un. William Ogilvy Dalgleish	5390
Lib. Sir John Ogilvie	4401	Un. W. C. Smith	5066
Lib. J. Meiklejohn, St Andrews	2231	Soc. W. Macdonald	1313
Un. J. Lake Gloag, solicitor	573		
<b>1880, Apr 2,</b>	<b>Electorate 14,566</b>	<b>1892, July 16,</b>	<b>Electorate 18,241</b>
<b>Lib. Frank Henderson</b> , merchant	6750	<b>Lib. Edmund Robertson</b>	7602
<b>Lib. George Armitstead</b>	9168	<b>Lib. John Leng</b>	7592
Un. James Yeaman	4493	Un. William Ogilvy Dalgleish	5659
		Un. William Smith, Advocate	5066
		Soc. W. Macdonald	354
<b>1885, Nov 25,</b>	<b>Electorate 17,420</b>	<b>1900, Oct 3,</b>	<b>Electorate 19,346</b>
<b>Lib. Charles Lacaita</b> , London	8261	<b>Lib. Edmund Robertson</b>	7777
<b>Lib. Edmund Robertson</b> , barrister	7187	<b>Lib. John Leng</b>	7650
Lib. Alex Hay Moncur, ex-Provost	6279	Un. A.D. Smith	5181
Un. Edward Jenkins	5149	Un. J. D. Graham	5152
<b>1886, July 3,</b>	<b>Electorate 17,420</b>		
<b>Lib. Edmund Robertson</b>	8236		
<b>Lib. Charles Lacaita</b>	8216		
Un. B. de Courcy Nixon, Devon	3545		
Un. Sir Henry Dermot-Daly,	3346		

Source: DA & DC election coverage, 1868-1900

Table One shows the growth in the city's electorate from 14,779 in 1868 to nearly 20,000 in 1900. In all elections shown male Liberal candidates were returned virtually untroubled, the "double" system of votes reflected in the totals. There are a sprinkling of jute barons in the lists, and the emergence in November 1885 of barrister Edmund Robertson, a local man who became Professor of Law in University College, London. Robertson represented the city until 1908, became Lord of the Admiralty and ultimately, in 1908, was elevated to the peerage, paving the way for Winston Churchill's candidacy in Dundee. It is of interest to note the presence of Mr John Leng from 1889 on. The respected editor of the *Dundee Advertiser* was clearly not reluctant to fly

his political colours. The presence of a Labour candidate in 1892 changed the political map of Dundee for all time. Although W. Macdonald secured a bare fraction of the votes cast that year, he was a precursor to a determined challenge in the city to establish a credible Labour party based on Dundee's working class population.

**TABLE TWO: Dundee City Parliamentary elections 1906 - 1922**

(those elected in bold)

<b>1906, January 16</b>	<b>Electorate 19,492</b>	<b>1917, July 30</b>	<b>Turnout 9338</b>
<b>Lib. Edmund Robertson</b>	9276	(On Mr Churchill's recall to Cabinet.)	
<b>Lab. A. Wilkie</b>	6883	<b>Lib. Rt. Hon. W.S. Churchill</b>	7302
Lib. H. Robson	6122	Proh. Edwin Scrymgeour	2036
Un. Lt. E. Shackleton	3865		
Un. A.D. Smith	3185		
<b>1908, May 9</b>	<b>Electorate 18,975</b>	<b>1918, Dec 14</b>	<b>Electorate 88,677</b>
<b>Lib. Winston S. Churchill</b>	7079	<b>Lib. Rt. Hon. W.S. Churchill</b>	25,788
<b>Un. Sir George W. Baxter</b>	4370	<b>Lab. A. Wilkie</b>	24,822
Lab. G.H. Stuart	4014	Ind. Edwin Scrymgeour	10,423
Proh. Edwin Scrymgeour	655	Soc. J.S. Brown	7769
<b>1910, Jan 18</b>	<b>Electorate 19,374</b>	<b>1922, Nov 15</b>	<b>Electorate 78,337</b>
<b>Lib. Rt. Hon. W.S. Churchill</b>	10,747	<b>Ind. Proh Edwin Scrymgeour</b>	32,578
<b>Lab. A. Wilkie</b>	10,365	<b>Lab. E.D. Morel</b>	30,292
Un. Seymour Lloyd	4552	N. Lib. D.J. Macdonald	22,244
Un. James Glass	4339	N. Lib. Rt Hon W.S. Churchill	20,466
Proh. Edwin Scrymgeour	1512	Lib. R.R. Pilkington	6681
		Com. W. Gallacher	5906
<b>1910, Dec 8</b>	<b>Electorate 19,118</b>		
<b>Lib. Rt. Hon. W.S. Churchill</b>	9240		
<b>Lab. A. Wilkie</b>	8957		
Un. Sir G.W. Baxter	5685		
Un. Seymour Lloyd	4914		
Proh. Edwin Scrymgeour	1825		

Source: DA & DC election coverage, 1906-1922

A watershed was achieved in 1906 when Dundee returned one of 40 Labour MPs throughout Britain. Alexander Wilkie (1850-1928), the first Labour member, was a trade unionist of national repute and probably won the support (if only a plumper vote) of many of the city's working men who likely did not take to the second Liberal candidate standing in Dundee in 1905, the Glasgow-born Mayor of Kensington. Only 37% of the vote in 1906 supported the two Liberal candidates, and 19% the two Unionists, one of whom was the polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922) (who was supported financially in his expeditions by the Dundee jute baron Sir James Caird). Nearly 20% had supported

Edmund Robertson, the sitting Dundee Liberal MP (and Admiralty Secretary) and Wilkie together, and 16% had plumped for Wilkie (DC 17.1.1906). Thus Wilkie's overall total was sufficient to see him elected with Robertson. Buoyed by that breakthrough in 1906, Labour attempted to take both Dundee seats in 1908 in a by-election brought about by the elevation of Edmund Robertson to the peerage. This failed and despite the best efforts of Britain's leading suffragists, Winston Churchill was elected with a reduced Liberal majority. In the following two elections, both in 1910, Wilkie was returned in Dundee along with Churchill. Both were re-elected in 1918, by which time the former was Minister for Munitions, Secretary for War and Air, and Colonial Secretary. Churchill was eventually humiliated in Dundee by Edwin Scrymgeour (see below), who became Britain's one and only Prohibitionist MP when he defeated the Cabinet minister in 1922. One of the fascinating elements in Table 2 is Scrymgeour's inexorable rise to succeed in reaching his parliamentary goal at the sixth attempt. The presence of the Communist Willie Gallacher in 1922 is also worthy of note, as is the great increase in the electorate in 1918 and 1922, the result of enfranchisement legislation.

**TABLE THREE: Dundee City Parliamentary elections, 1923 - 1945.**

(Those elected in bold)

<b>1923, December 6, Electorate 75,561</b>	<b>1931, October 27, Electorate 109,272</b>
<b>Ind. E. Scrymgeour 25,753</b>	<b>Lib. D. Foot 52,048</b>
<b>Lab. E. Morel 23,345</b>	<b>Un. Miss F. Horsbrugh 48,556</b>
Lib. Sir John Pratt 23,031	Lab. H. Marcus 44,457
Un. F.W. Wallace 20,053	Ind. E. Scrymgeour 32,229
Com. W. Gallacher 10,380	Com. R. Stewart 10,264
<b>1924, October 29, Electorate 78,297</b>	<b>1935, November 14, Electorate 112,393</b>
<b>Lab. E. Morel 32,846</b>	<b>Nat.Un. Miss F. Horsbrugh 50,542</b>
<b>Ind. E. Scrymgeour 29,193</b>	<b>Nat. Lib. D. Foot 49,632</b>
Un. F. W. Wallace 28,118	Lab. M. Marcus 44,457
Lib. Sir A. R. Duncan 25,566	Lab. R. Gibson 43,747
Com. R. Stewart 8340	
<b>1924, December 22, Electorate 78,297</b> (on the death of Mr Morel)	<b>1945, July 5, Electorate 110,176</b>
<b>Lab. Tom Johnston 22,973</b>	<b>Lab. T.F. Cook 48,804</b>
Lib. E.D. Simon 10,234	<b>Lab. John Strachey 48,393</b>
	Lib. D. Foot 33,230
	Un. Miss F. Horsbrugh 32,309
	Scot Nat. A. Donaldson 7775
<b>1929, May 30, Electorate 109,126</b>	
<b>Ind. E. Scrymgeour 50,073</b>	
<b>Lab. H. Marcus 47,602</b>	
Lib. J.H. Stewart 33,890	
Un. F. W. Wallace 33,868	
Com. R. Stewart 6,160	

Source: DA & DC election coverage, 1823-1945

In the General Election of 1923, Scrymgeour and Morel were re-elected but, as will be shown below, Lady Baxter, the long-time president of the Dundee Women Citizens' Association, was adopted to stand as a Unionist in the city, but withdrew before nomination papers had to be lodged. In 1924 the constituency of Dundee stood at 78,297 voters. Then, by reason of the extension of the franchise to women over the age of 21 in 1929, the figure rose to around 110,000. It is worth noting that the register for voters for Dundee in the General Election that year indicated that women formed an extremely large percentage of the parliamentary vote in Dundee. Of a total of 81,658 voters, 54% were men and 46% women (Register of Voters, 1929). 1. And, by the end of the Second World War, Dundee had a significantly greater number of women parliamentary voters than men: for example, 50,935 men and 65,895 women in 1946, 50,779 men and 65,596 women in 1947 and 65,290 women against 50,990 men in 1948. This, by no coincidence, is the period when Florence Horsbrugh successfully won and defended Dundee (See section below).

In October 1937 Lily Miller, Dundee's first woman councillor, and by then convener of Dundee Corporation's education committee, was one of only five women in Scotland nominated for selection as Labour candidates for the General Election of 1940. Ultimately, Mrs Miller lost out to Bailie Jean Mann, a Glasgow magistrate who, when war postponed the election, switched to stand in Coatbridge in 1945 and won a seat in Parliament. It would have been interesting to see how Baillie Mann would have fared against Mrs Horsbrugh. But that year Horsbrugh lost her seat in Dundee and the city returned to a position it had last enjoyed in the 1920s, as a safe Labour constituency.

In 1950, Dundee was redistributed into two distinct and unrelated constituencies - Dundee East and Dundee West. The electorates (as today) were divided

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1. Indeed, of the local government electoral total of 73,862, women were actually in the majority, by 54.5% to 45.5%.



roughly equally in terms of numbers, but, in the polls following the Second World War, the Labour Party continued to dominate.

**TABLE FOUR: Dundee City Parliamentary Elections 1950-1963**

(Those elected in bold)

**1950, February 23**

DUNDEE EAST Electorate 55,030  
**Lab. T.F. Cook** 26,005  
 Nat L. & U. J. Henderson 21,658  
 Com. D. Bowman 1,093

DUNDEE WEST Electorate 60,238  
**Lab. J. Strachey** 28,386  
 U. & Nat L. J. Wedderburn 23,685  
 Lib. C. Canning 986

**1951, October 25**

DUNDEE EAST Electorate 56,784  
**Lab. T.F. Cook** 26,668  
 Con. Miss J.S. Murray 22,863

DUNDEE WEST Electorate 64,798  
**Lab. J. Strachey** 29,020  
 Lib. J. Junior 25,714  
 Com. D. Bowman 1,508

**1952, July 18**

DUNDEE EAST Electorate 56,784  
 (On death of Mr Cook)  
**Lab. G.M. Thomson** 22,161  
 Un and Lib Nat P. Cowcher 14,035  
 Scot Nat. Donald Stewart 2,931  
 World Parl. E.G. Macfarlane 290

**1955, May 26**

DUNDEE EAST Electorate 57,403  
**Lab. G.M. Thomson** 25,646  
 C. & Nat L. G. R. Taylor 21,606

DUNDEE WEST Electorate 62,425  
**Lab. J. Strachey** 26,082  
 C. & Lib Nat G. Pirie 24,208  
 Com. D. Bowman 1,335

**1959, October 8**

DUNDEE EAST Electorate 58,537  
**Lab. G. Thomson** 26,263  
 C. & Lib Nat. R. McCrindle 22,082

DUNDEE WEST Electorate 62,804  
**Lab. J. Strachey** 25,857  
 C. & Lib Nat. R. Taylor 25,143  
 Com. D. Bowman 1,087

**1963, November 21**

DUNDEE WEST Electorate 62,004  
 (On the death of Mr Strachey)  
**Lab. P. Doig** 22,449  
 Con. Dr. R. Taylor 17,494  
 Scot Nat. Dr J. Lees 3,285  
 Com. D. Bowman 1,170

Source: DA & DC election coverage, 1950-1963

It can be seen from these General Election and By-Election results both the dominance of the Labour Party in Dundee since 1900 and especially since the end of the Second World War, and the emergence of the four major parties in Scotland with which we are familiar today, as well as the dogged presence of a Communist candidate. The candidates include one woman, the Conservative Miss Murray who stood in 1951. John Strachey, who won a Dundee seat in the 1945 General Election, became a famous food minister, popularised in the ration-time rhyme, "*Strachey, Strachey, hear it in the streets. What do the kids want - more sweets!*"

The city's Parliamentary Elections between 1964 and modern times have followed this familiar pattern of returning two Labour MPs, one of them being George Thomson, now Lord Thomson of Monifieth, who resigned the Dundee East seat after more than 20 years to become a European Commissioner. The only interruption to post-war Labour dominance was the victory of Gordon Wilson, who took Dundee East (which takes in the affluent dormitory suburbs of Broughty Ferry and Monifieth) for the Scottish National Party between 1974 and 1987. The lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 by the Representation of the People's Act 1969 added an estimated 12,000 additional Dundonians to the Parliamentary Register. It was also an era in which women began to make their presence felt in terms of candidate numbers.

### **Dundee women prior to winning votes: the suffrage campaign**

**Fellow men! why should the lords try to despise,  
And prohibit women from having the benefit of  
the Parliamentary Franchise?  
When they pay the same taxes as you and me,  
I consider they ought to have the same liberty.**

"Women's Suffrage." William McGonagall

This section deals with the period entering the 20th century when parliamentary politics could be distinguished from political activity concerned directly with the home and the workplace. It seeks to show the extent of the campaign in Dundee, and beyond, to secure the parliamentary vote for women. This is an aspect of local political activity worthy of examination for a number of valid reasons. Firstly, as Elspeth King pointed out (1992, pp120-121), "the lack of attention given to the Scottish suffrage movement is a historiographical scandal," having suffered, she claims, from the double disadvantages of being Scottish and feminist." Moreover, the votes for women campaign in Dundee

achieved national prominence in 1908 at the height of suffrage activity, when the highly-regarded Liberal Cabinet minister Winston Churchill became one of the city's MPs. It is useful to determine whether Dundee women became involved in the vociferous enfranchisement campaign which accompanied his election and term of office. The section seeks to show not only the extent of the campaign, and the dynamics of the movement propelling it, it also asks whether the movement was indigenous or whether it was "imported" as a result of Churchill's arrival, and the presence of the Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith in the neighbouring constituency of North Fife. Breitenbach and Gordon have claimed (1992, p6) that the "women's movement has often been characterised dismissively as a middle-class movement, but it had both working class precedent and working class adherents." In the same work, however, (ibid, p186) James Smyth claimed that "No suffrage societies were established in working class communities." This chapter will investigate class consciousness and draw a conclusion centred on the notion that, despite a radical tradition on the shop floor in Dundee, only the city's female middle-classes embraced the enfranchisement struggle wholeheartedly, although, curiously, their willingness to join the cause in numbers out of all proportion to their societal niche says much of their independent minds and actions, promoting the idea, once again, that Dundee women are, in some respects, "different."

Given Dundee's rapid and remarkable industrial transformation in the 19th century and the development of a combative shop floor culture in its massive textiles sector, it might be expected of the city's working women to be in the vanguard of those espousing the suffrage cause as it took on renewed vigour in the early years of the 20th century. This was, after all, the zenith of Dundee's manufacturing prosperity - 43,000 people employed in the city on 268,000 spindles and 14,000 power looms in over 150 mills and factories (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1903). An examination of important primary source material, documents, newspapers and the sparse literature which has dealt with the franchise struggle in Scotland, helps to lay the groundwork for an examination

of Dundee's role in the votes for women campaign. It will be shown to have been a pivotal role. The first act of militancy in Scotland took place in Dundee in 1907 (DA, 11.4.1907). The first demonstration of the suffragettes' tactic of disrupting public meetings occurred in the city (ibid) and, though there was no figurehead in the suffrage movement in Scotland, its recognised leader was the Dundee artist Ethel Moorhead (Leneman, 1991, p178). Moreover, some of the UK's most militant acts, many of its largest demonstrations, its political imprisonments, and most violent confrontations took place in Dundee. 1. Dundee women were imprisoned and endured forcible feeding (Watson, 1990, pp43-44).

In terms of suffrage organisation, the city boasted a branch of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) - one of only four in Scotland - and branches of the Women's Freedom League (WFL) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Furthermore, the movement's national leaders - including the Pankhurst family - stayed in Dundee from time to time and became well-known figures on the city's streets.

This picture of a "suffragette city" raises the possibility that the female collective solidarity which evolved in the mills and factories in late Victorian times (See Chapter Four) was the spark which ignited political activity on the distinct issue of parliamentary votes for women. It might be assumed, too, that this heritage of female militancy might have helped to create suffragette leaders, as it did in the Lancashire textile towns (see below); that it might have manifested itself as pressure on the civic authorities; that it might have generated support from the unions and other women's groups; and drawn support

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1. Dundee was the target for arson attacks, post box fires, window smashing, an attempt to disrupt a royal visit, even a daring plot to blow up one of its most celebrated landmarks, Dudhope Castle.

from the vibrant local Press. 1. Despite the paucity of primary source data it is difficult to imagine that women in Dundee would not have been aware of the suffrage campaign from the Dundee newspapers, especially after the first act of militancy in London in October, 1905 which resulted in the imprisonment of women. While there was always a chance of a reader being misinformed by the politically polarised Liberal *Dundee Advertiser* and Conservative *Dundee Courier*, there was little possibility of them being uninformed. 2. Additionally, the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union produced its *Herald* news sheet from 1885, while the rival Jute and Flax Workers' Union published *The Globe*. Local printers and publishers carried on a tradition of flyposting news of most political meetings in the city. 3.

Added to this, Jill Norris and Jill Liddington pointed out that in English textile towns by this time, "working class women themselves were mobilising to obtain the franchise." Leah Leneman also commented on the mobilisation of textile workers to support the suffrage cause, "The work done in Lancashire among women textile workers had inspired the Scottish Society (ie the National Society of Women's Suffrage) to get up meetings in Dundee" (1991, p39). Elspeth King reported (1992, p136) that in Manchester "the Suffragette Society was ... largely composed of women textile workers." Sylvia Pankhurst recalled that the working class and suffrage movement in Glasgow were quite "closely intermingled" (ibid, p43).

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1. It has been necessary in this chapter to draw heavily on contemporary newspapers for fuller details of suffragist activity in Dundee. Few records are extant. Elspeth King (1992, p136) confirms, for example, that no records of the WSPU in Scotland have survived. Dundee's two morning daily papers, the *Courier* and the *Advertiser*, have been praised recently by Eleanor Gordon and Leah Leneman for their fulsome coverage of the Edwardian suffrage debate. Both papers provided daily and extensive coverage of events, publishing many speeches in their entirety. Importantly, the papers also provided local and national figures in the suffrage campaign with their own columns, and we can assume that these accurately reflect the women's views. The papers also allowed a near 10-year debate on the subject in the correspondence columns, and returned to the issues frequently in their Leader commentaries. Other mass readership Dundee publications, such as the *Evening Telegraph*, *People's Journal*, *Weekly News* and *Sunday Post* also provided insights into the campaign.

2. This is supported by dozens of letters to the papers by pro- and anti-suffragists.

3. There are examples of these in the map room, Dundee Central Libraries.

Yet, though it follows from the foregoing that a certain awareness must have been present in Dundee, support in Dundee for votes for women was lukewarm in the early years of the 20th century. The leadership which might have emerged from the professional classes was more ideological than inspirational, and took the form of spirited letter writing to local papers. When in December 1901 the Edinburgh branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage reported its keen disappointment of "continued indifference, if not opposition" to the cause shown by political associations, the *Dundee Advertiser* gently offered an explanation as to why women's suffrage was being ignored in Dundee by suggesting that it might be the case that the Liberal Party's political stranglehold on the city might be loosened because of the possibility that "all women would vote Tory" (DA 3.10.1901).

The prospect of a female block vote was a key contemporary issue influencing women's enfranchisement. Catriona Burness has alluded to real fears at the time over the possibility of such a vote (1992, p59), and this is borne out in a speech by a Mrs Mill, of the Women Citizens' Association in Dundee, who told a meeting of the necessity of every woman going to the poll and recording her vote, "and thus for the first time take advantage of using direct force" (ET 18.11.1920). Compare this to the situation in the Lancashire textile towns where, in March 1901, a petition asking for the vote signed by 29,359 female factory operatives, was presented to Members of Parliament. This was followed in February 1902 by a petition signed by 33,184 textile workers in Yorkshire and 4,292 textile workers in Cheshire (Parker Hume, 1982, p19). The NUWSS held meetings in Dundee during 1903 but could not generate interest other than among some members of the professional and leisured classes. By June 1904 the NUWSS had established a committee in Dundee but not a branch, as it had in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. And yet Parker Hume believes it was NUWSS policy to target the working classes: "Although the working NUWSS was primarily a middle-class organisation, led by representatives of the middle classes, its members nonetheless recognised the necessity

of broadening its base of support and attracting working women into the suffrage movement" (ibid p19). An indication of the apparent lukewarm interest in the campaign in Dundee came in August 1906, some three years after the launch of the Women's Social and Political Union, during a visit to the city by Teresa Billington, the Manchester teacher and suffragette leader. The *Advertiser* noted:

"The question might well have been asked by any one attending the gathering in Albert Square last night whether women really cared for the suffrage. Some 2000 men and a few, very few, women assembled to hear Miss Teresa Billington, the famous suffragette, speak."

(DA 18.8.1906)

Confirming this apparent indifference, Miss Billington wrote of her visit to Dundee: "Dundee is a city of women workers. They are women who are underpaid, badly housed, badly fed. They are brutalised by the conditions of life under which they are forced to live. These women need every protection political power can give them. They need the vote that they may slowly open the gates and know what it is to live. In London this same type of women has been reached. Here in Dundee we have not won her - not yet" (*Labour Record*, October 1906). In fact, had it not been for the coincidental visit of Mr Asquith to the neighbouring East Fife constituency during September 1906, which led to an influx of suffrage leaders from the south, Dundee may well have remained alienated from key developments in the campaign. Additionally, the movement's leaders were finding their Scottish mission work problematic. The *Courier* reported Christabel Pankhurst's recruitment drive in nearby Cupar:

"Questions were invited - none forthcoming. She then suggested that someone might propose a resolution that a women's franchise clause should be put in the Plural Voting Bill, but still no one would respond. She ultimately proposed it herself and invited someone to second it, but even that failed to draw."

(Dundee Courier, 13.9.1906)

That year, the movement's national leaders placed a modest advertisement in the *Dundee Advertiser* inviting interested parties to discuss the merits of establishing a WSPU branch in the city. Thanks largely to Christabel's mother, Emmeline Pankhurst, a committee of the WSPU was subsequently formed (DA 16.10.1906). The self-proclaimed "National Liberal Daily" was moved to congratulate the movement's leaders on the "spirited performance which they have sustained through six hilarious months" (ibid). But a leading article went on to make a telling point about public support in relation to Dundee's experience, "The point on which Mr Asquith chiefly founded his opposition was that he had no evidence that the majority of women were desirous of change" (ibid).

Up to 1906, then, there is little evidence of wholehearted support for the votes for women movement in Dundee. That year, however, brought an untypical interplay between local suffrage leaders and working women in Dundee when a deputation consisting of the new WSPU office bearers was received by the executive committee of the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives' Union. The union's founder, the Rev Henry Williamson (see Chapter Four) sympathised with the first wave of arrests in London, while "not committing oneself to the methods adopted by the advocates of women's suffrage." Having said that, he did feel that the sentences imposed on the London militants were out of all proportion to the offence. The meeting unanimously agreed the resolution:

"That this meeting of the committee of the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives' Union, consisting mainly of female workers, protests against the vindictive and cowardly sentences of imprisonment for ladies of the highest character, thereby associating respectable women with persons of another description."

(Mill & Factory Herald, Nov 1906)

Williamson's ambivalence appears typical at this period. There is scant contemporary evidence associating union activity to the political ambitions of the



suffragists. The records show that most mill militancy was concerned with personal grievances such as wages and hours of work, and the Dundee & District Jute and Flax Workers' Union committee minutes reflect this (especially the union's letter books, 1906 on), 1. though in truth the wealth of experience and the organisational know-how developed in establishing unions in the city might have complemented moves towards electoral equality in impact if not in ideological potency, but the connection was seldom made. 2.

That is not to say that working women ignored the votes-for-women movement completely. In 1907 a mass demonstration took place in Edinburgh in an effort to force the Government to adopt a franchisement Bill. The *Dundee Advertiser* and *Dundee Courier* agree that around 300 women travelled by special train to march under the Dundee "Votes for Women" banner. The *Advertiser* referred to a large contingent of Jute and Flax Workers Union members and "factory girls" among the Dundee women (DA 7.10.1907). This appears to be a significant glimpse of workers' participation in the suffrage campaign, but it bears scrutiny that the paper did not provide exact information concerning the numbers in the working girls' group and that this report, although since quoted by Leneman as evidence of workers' participation in the Dundee suffrage campaign, was not corroborated elsewhere. However, the women's union *did* support the WSPU by sending delegates to a local branch meeting in 1907 (JFWU executive minutes, 25.6.1907).

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1. The ambivalence towards the suffrage movement is recorded in the minutes of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union. At one meeting of the executive committee "several members of committee signed a petition against the Women's Enfranchisement Bill (JFWU minutes, 29.2.1907). On another occasion (February 1908), the committee simply laid a petition calling for the release of suffragette hunger strikers "on the table."

2. It is not as if there had been a fundamental change in the city's industrial make-up at this time. In 1911, for example, as suffragette activity was on the threshold of a heightened period of militancy, two thirds (66%) of Dundee's occupied population was engaged in the manufacturing industries, a figure almost double that of Aberdeen (36.4%) and Edinburgh (32.4%), and far in excess even of Glasgow, where 48% of the total occupied population worked in this sector (Carstairs, 1968, p321). As we have seen, an even greater contrast with these major cities was provided by Dundee's reliance on a single industry - textiles, mainly jute. Furthermore, women formed a far higher proportion of the workforce in Dundee than in other cities.

The fact that Dundee women had joined in a spectacular protest in the capital was remarked upon by the Advertiser's "special representative" who travelled with the party...

"Probably, until Saturday, very few Scotsmen treated the movement seriously. Now it has to be reckoned with as a combative force in modern social evolution."

(Dundee Advertiser 7.10.1907)

Perhaps this incident prompted Leah Lenemen (1992, p82) to write of the activity of 1907... "It is clear that at the close of 1907 the strength of the movement in the city (Dundee) came from the citizens, not from outsiders." She might cite, for example, letters exchanged between pro- and anti-suffragists in the Dundee newspapers as evidence for this. It is the case, however, that influential personalities linked to the suffrage struggle were accorded the platform of the local press to explain their views. Local women were presumably inspired at this time by "outsiders" such as Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst, Teresa Billington, Annie Kenney, Mrs Cobden-Sanderson, Charlotte Despard and Mrs Pethwick Lawrence, all of whom spoke in the city and wrote to the local papers. Billington, for example, wrote her own series of articles for the Dundee *People's Journal* in 1907.

An incident in November 1907 indicates that the participation of local women was not altogether central to the movement at this time. When the Rt Hon Edmund Robertson, secretary of the Admiralty and one of Dundee's two MPs addressed constituents in the city's Gilfillan Hall that month, he was interrupted by suffragettes posted "as if by concerted arrangement" throughout the theatre. Asked many suffrage-related questions, he declined to be drawn on the subject. Three local women Agnes Husband, Lila Clunas and Annot Wilkie kept up a barrage of questions. "Are you personally in favour of votes for women?" asked Miss Clunas, a teacher and later a prominent member of the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League. "No I am not," replied Robertson (DC 25.11.1907). And at this point, according to a report of the meeting in

the *People's Journal*, Miss Wilkie rose to her feet and moved a vote of no confidence in Mr Robertson (PJ 27.11.1907).

Yet it can be gauged from the coverage of this protest action that suffrage successes were limited and their impact largely insignificant in Dundee at this time, and not at all taken seriously. The *Advertiser's* editorial weighed up the impact of Miss Wilkie and the five women "who stood around their champion" .... "All six, despite their apparent boldness, seemed conscious that they were making themselves objects of ridicule" (ibid). Perhaps the most telling point was made by Robertson when he pointed out that in all his years as an MP (since 1885) he "had never heard the suffrage question before" (ibid).

The key event in national terms in 1907 was a schism in the WSPU which resulted in the formation of the breakaway Women's Freedom League. It will be seen later that the WFL was the most important outlet for suffrage protest and activity in Dundee. Agnes Husband, a dressmaker and high-profile socialist, became its first secretary and she was joined on the steering committee by teacher Lila Clunas.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies continued to have a presence in Dundee. These constitutionalist suffragists opted for negotiation rather than confrontation and believed that moral force was more effective an argument than militant, disruptive action. This was supported by letters to the local Press while, elsewhere, the influential Dundee Women's Liberal Association, founded in 1895 by the daughter of John Leng MP, the *Advertiser's* Editor, was attempting to find its feet in the debate. Its annual general meeting in 1906 was told by the outgoing president that - "it could do some practical work to get more ladies to vote" (DWLA *Annual Report*, November, 1906). But it is clear from the organisation's records at this time that its idea of influence was achievable by getting more men into Parliament who would then legislate more in keeping with the membership's own views. Nonetheless,

membership of the Association in October 1907 stood at 335, a considerable number within Dundee's relatively small middle class (ibid).

What had emerged in Dundee by 1907 was a nucleus of prominent local campaigners, women such as Lila Clunas, Agnes Husband, and the Wilkie sisters Annot and Helen. Indeed, Annot Wilkie was an effective orchestrator of the group of Dundee women who plagued the Press with pro-vote letters. In January 1908 she set off to Manchester to take part in a protest against the return from Africa of Winston Churchill MP. Wilkie interrupted his public meeting with a direct question as to how he proposed to improve the social condition of the women of England. She took up the story in the columns of the *Courier*.... "As he gazed in my direction with his curious glassy eyes, a crowd of stewards rushed towards me and pushed me out of the hall" (DC 21.1.1908).

On May 2, 1908, Churchill arrived in Dundee to seek election to the seat made vacant by the elevation of Edmund Robertson to the peerage as Baron Lochee. Churchill had been defeated in North West Manchester, but, according to a headline story in the fiercely-Liberal *Dundee Advertiser*, six minutes after leaving the declaration at that poll, he was handed a telegram from the Dundee Liberal Association offering him the candidature at Dundee. He travelled to Scotland overnight and was greeted at the railway station by thousands of jubilant Liberal supporters, a scene which prompted the *Advertiser* to label the suffrage movement "an impotent quantity," a reference to the claim that he had been ousted at Manchester because of the women's campaign against him there (DA 2.5.1908). The Liberal *People's Journal*, in its Dundee edition, was more charitable...

"As bees bizz oot wi' angry fyke, so do the suffragettes continue to sally forth from their respective 'bikes' in the Cowgate and the Overgate in a lively endeavour to distract as much voting allegiance from the Liberal nominee as their powers of oratory and suasion render possible." (People's Journal, 2.5.1908)

By this time, Churchill was a powerful political figure. As custom dictated, his elevation to a new post in the Cabinet meant he had to put himself forward for re-election. It was the policy then of both the WSPU and the NUWSS to campaign against the Liberal Party in every by-election in protest against the Government which consistently refused their demands for voting equity. Elspeth King's works on the Scottish suffrage movement deal primarily with Glasgow and Edinburgh, but she acknowledges (1992, p135) that the WSPU leadership focused on Dundee and Winston Churchill in 1908 "being limited in funds and unable to fight every election at that time, they had to concentrate their efforts on him." This thesis agrees with that conclusion. Churchill's meetings in Dundee were over subscribed and his policies and speeches widely reported. Suffrage leaders from across Britain tracked him to Dundee and staged a series of noisy meetings and counter-meetings. On May 5 1908, major demonstrations were addressed in the city by Charlotte Despard, leader of the Women's Freedom League and by Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel, the leaders of the WSPU. 1.

Regardless, Winston Churchill was elected with a comfortable (if reduced) Liberal majority while Mary Maloney's diversionary actions (see note below) served to act as a distraction from much good work by a coalition of WSPU and

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1. In suffragette folklore, and, indeed, in suffrage literature, the Dundee by-election of 1908 is remembered for Miss Moloney's Bell. Mary Moloney was a member of the WFL who had taken part in various demonstrations. On an occasion during which she had been carried out on the shoulders of London dockers from a suffrage meeting, Mr Churchill allegedly remarked that she had been "drunk" in the arms of the dockers and that this was typical of the behaviour of members of the WFL. Moloney vowed to pursue Churchill until she had exacted an apology, which brought her to Dundee. Whenever Churchill spoke, Maloney shook a large handbell which drowned out what he was saying, or, at least, caused a noisy diversion. Her actions were taken in fun initially, but some meetings had to be cancelled because of the uproar she caused, and there was much debate over whether the suffrage cause was being damaged through her independent action. After one bell-ringing episode at a Dundee foundry, the *Advertiser's* editorial demanded swift action, "Impudent obstruction such as that offered at Blackness Road yesterday is a distinct breach of the laws of the country and the Dundee police were lacking in their duty to have permitted it" (DA 5.5.1908). Once Churchill avoided her by staging a meeting at breakfast time. On another occasion he made a speech in a shed to escape her. A works manager took a vote as to who was to be heard - Mr Churchill or Miss Moloney. Nerves were wearing thin elsewhere: "The contest is haunted by the sound of bells. The jingle, to use a mild term, is getting on electors' nerves" (PJ 8.5.1908).

WFL and, to a lesser extent, the NUWSS. It prompted the Pankhursts to write to the *Dundee Advertiser* absolving themselves, and the WSPU, of responsibility for Maloney's actions.

It is important to relate these events as it helps to explain why present-day references to Dundee's contribution to the votes for women campaign tend to focus on the actions of "imported" suffrage figures during the Winston Churchill period. For instance, in September 1909 the city was catapulted into national headlines once more through the actions of an English suffragette. That month, Cabinet minister Louis Samuel MP was due to speak at the Kinaird Hall, in Reform Street, in the heart of Dundee's city centre. Rumours had swept the city for several days that women would disrupt the meeting, resulting in a deployment of a large police presence in front of the hall on the evening of the meeting. Chalked invitations appeared on streets - "Come and help the Suffragettes rush Samuel's meeting." A large crowd gathered. Tempers flared and five women were arrested and taken away by police. Isabel Kelley, a WSPU member from London, had concealed herself the previous night in the attic of the building, intending to lower herself down into the hall during Samuel's speech. She was thwarted by a locked skylight and was discovered in a corridor by a steward who sat on her until the police arrived. "A pity," commented the *Advertiser* next day. "To see her dangling from the roof and delivering a speech from this novel platform would have been an interesting if not edifying spectacle" (DA 14.9.1909). Kelley was taken to the Bell Street police station in Dundee but liberated within hours because of what was said to be a lack of evidence. <sup>1</sup> The *Advertiser* and, indeed, most of the Dundee Press, took a less lightweight attitude towards those arrested on that occasion. Two of the five detained were released. Those charged were Edinburgh students Alice Paul and Edith New, and Lucy Burns from London. In court they admitted adopting unconstitutional methods.

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1. This was surprising given her costume and props, which included a 24-metre rope and an iron hook - which she apparently reclaimed next day from the scene of her adventure.

Burns and Paul, who were discovered to have large stones concealed in their pockets, were fined £5 with the option of 10 days' in prison. New was given a £5 fine or five days in jail. In common with WSPU policy, the defendants opted for the custodial sentence, ensuring Dundee the unenviable accolade of being the first town in Scotland to send suffragettes to prison.

Clearly the suffragette leaders who journeyed north to campaign in by-elections (Stonehaven & Dundee, 1908) were extremely visible, and never more so than in May 1908 and in 1909, prior to that year's "truce." We have recorded the impact of Mary Moloney and Isabel Kelley, and the imprisonment of three outside activists, which resulted in a support march of 10,000 in Dundee led by Adela Pankhurst, plus several visits by other members of the Pankhurst family, General Flora Drummond of the WSPU, Charlotte Despard, president of the Women's Freedom League and Millicent Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Again, in 1909, when Churchill rashly agreed to meet a deputation from the Dundee branch of the WFL and told them, "The frenzy of a few is no substitute for the earnest convictions and wishes of millions," before telling a Women's Liberal Association meeting that the militant struggle was "women's cause marching backwards," (DA 19.10.1909), the women who were arrested after the subsequent melee the next day, when Churchill's views were made public, were hunger strike veterans Maud Joachim, Helen Archdale, Adela Pankhurst, Catherine Corbett and Laura Evans - all "outsiders." Four of the five women, who immediately went on hunger strike after being convicted, were English, while Helen Archdale was from Edinburgh. Also recorded were many letters to the local Press from Scottish leaders of the movement, such as the widely-respected Glasgow campaigner Helen Fraser and Mrs Teresa Billington-Greig, both of the WSPU executive. These were particularly prevalent in the *Dundee Advertiser* and *Dundee Courier* in 1908 and 1909. This preponderance of outside influences is usually explained in terms of the presence of Churchill and Prime Minister Asquith nearby. It can be inferred that these prominent suffrage leaders

adopted missionary zeal and took their philosophical ideals from their middle-class drawing rooms to Dundee street corners in the manner Esther Roper had done in the Lancashire cotton towns in 1900 (Liddington & Norris, 1994, p26). As the Churchill by-election approached in May 1908, for instance, the leadership of the WSPU encouraged the women of Dundee to join *their* cause...

“Friends, we come before you to ask your help in the great effort we are making to win constitutional liberty for the women of the nation. We have come from North West Manchester, where the Electors helped the Women by defeating a Cabinet minister .... another Women’s victory in Dundee and Mr Asquith with his colleagues will have to consider not only promising, but GIVING votes to women.”

(Dundee election pamphlet, by Mrs Pankhurst, May 1908)

A *Courier* interview carried out in May 1989 with Mrs Agnes Stephen serves to illustrate the impact which the national suffrage leaders had in Dundee at this time. Mrs Stephen, then 96, was alert and lucid. She was born in 1893, near Inverness. Her father was in charge of stables on a large estate. She moved to Broughty Ferry, Dundee when she was one, her father setting up his own carrier’s business. She married a naval officer in 1914, a year after Broughty Ferry was absorbed into the city of Dundee. In later life she was an active campaigner for the Conservative Party. Mrs Stephen marked her 100th birthday with suffragette balloons and banners at her home in Broughty Ferry, Dundee, in 1993. She died in 1995, aged 101.

She recalled: “I must have been about eighteen years old when Mrs Pankhurst, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence and the other suffrage leaders visited Dundee. Mrs Pankhurst hired a lorry - one of those flat, horse-drawn coal lorries - to drive down to Broughty Ferry. It was draped with banners which read, *Votes for Women*. It stopped in Brook Street. Mrs Pankhurst stood on the back of the cart and called out for suffragette unity. A large crowd gathered, some in favour some not. The first meeting was enough to convince me, I stepped forward and shouted ‘Yes, I will join you.’”



“That night I joined the Women’s Freedom League along with several other young women. Our job was to persuade people that we should be allowed to vote. We would argue with men on street corners, their traditional meeting place. And we wouldn’t back down. I remember waiting for Mrs Pankhurst outside Lamb’s Hotel in Dundee where she was staying. We spoke together about the cause, but it was like preaching to the converted. They were passionate women, deadly earnest. But at the same time they were sincere and dedicated to women’s emancipation. And my word, they managed it in the end. What Mrs Pankhurst and her followers did was to put the spark of suffrage into us. She was a slight lady, not well built at all. But on those delicate shoulders rested all our hopes.”

Indeed, the movement’s national figures appear to have worked tirelessly for the cause during their time in Dundee. Mary Maloney claimed to have spoken at four “and sometimes five” meetings a day during her 10-day stay in the city (DC 11.5.1908). The bell-ringing WFL activist, for one, considered her mission one of conversion. After Churchill’s victory she remarked, “There is no doubt that we have done good propaganda work. One consolation we have is that we have the working women on our side, and we have made women take an interest in politics they never took before and this will bear fruit in the future” (ibid). Mary Gawthorpe, a prominent member of the WSPU executive, was of similar mind: “We are satisfied with our work in Dundee in that we have aroused the women in the city to take an interest in the question and I think we have the majority of the women on our side” (DC 11.5.1908). Maloney added, this time to the *Advertiser’s* reporter, “I think Dundee wants a good deal of looking after. The women here are very poor, and the wages are absurdly low for an industrial place like this. The housing is also very bad. We are only sowing the seeds and cannot expect the harvest so soon” (DA 11.5.1908). Indeed, as if to concur with these views, the Liberal-leaning *Advertiser*, in a celebratory leading article, said: “Their names have been in the mouths of the public almost as long as the names of the candidates.” It went

on: "For our own part, we have no doubts whatever that their strategy is radically bad. The movement is a failure and is bound to remain a failure" (ibid).

From what Moloney and Gawthorpe said, it is perhaps difficult to determine how the suffrage movement in Dundee could have developed independently within the city itself. The natural tendency in a city of women workers is to examine the role of these women. But although Liddington and Norris (1994, p20) claim that Lancashire cotton workers were debating votes for women "in meetings at their factory gates, street corners and town squares," had Dundee's 35,000 female mill and factory operatives done so, the columns of the ever-watchful Dundee Press would have certainly reported it.

As it is, few mentions are made of working class suffrage activity, unless in an unsavoury light. On election day in May 1908, for example, a group of girl mill workers gathered at Brown Street School polling station, not to support the suffragists, but apparently in the pay of Liberal Party activists with orders to drown out those supporting votes for women by standing alongside them and shouting them down. "The raucous voice created by employment in a spinning flat, backed by enthusiasm and innate love for a job of the kind, was a combination silencing the most shrieking suffragette" (PJ 9.5.1908). Similarly, when Dundee School Board debated the degeneracy of Dundee mill girls the following month, and a picture of a mill girl "masquerading as a young suffragette" beside Mr Churchill was brought to the board's notice, one of the board members, the Rev Henry Williamson, told the meeting that he "did not believe a mill girl in Dundee took any interest in suffragette matters" (Dundee School Board, committee minutes, June 1908). That, coming from the founder and president of the women-dominated Mill and Factory Operatives' Union, was a telling remark. In fact, the preceding February, in response to a letter from the Adult Suffrage Society, "several members of the committee" of the Dundee & District Jute and Flax Workers' Union signed a petition for Adult Suffrage and "against the Women's Enfranchisement Bill (JFWU minutes, 29.2.1907). That

union, which was instituted in March 1906, sent several delegates to WSPU meetings that year, on request, but remained largely ambivalent towards the suffrage question. When several women were imprisoned in February 1908, after emerging from a furniture van and attempting to enter the House of Commons, the JFWU committee merely agreed unanimously “to lay a petition for release of imprisoned suffragettes on the office table” - that is, to be signed on passing if so desired (JFWU minutes, 5.2.1908); a lukewarm response given that women outnumbered men on the committee, outnumbered men by four to one in the union’s membership, and that one of the women arrested was Annot Wilkie of Dundee.

A number of explanations might be put forward as to why Dundee’s working women were not more prominent in the votes for women campaign which swept the country during this non-violent period of the suffrage struggle. The most plausible is the most simple: women and girls in jute, many of them hard-pressed mothers, had no time to get involved in politics outside employment and must have considered that there was little to be benefited from it. Daily life was filled by a 10-hour shift, 6am to 6pm, and thereafter by domestic responsibilities. For many, politics must have seemed a luxury reserved for the city’s professional women and well-to-do classes. The two female jute unions, which were concerned almost entirely with wages and conditions, could muster a combined membership of only around one third of the female workforce at this time. Secondly, married women in particular must have been apprehensive about the possibility of losing their jobs if seen taking part in controversial activity outwith the mill. Mill poet Mary Brooksbank recalled in her slim and rare volume of memoirs (1973, p29): “The women in particular had much to be afraid of. Fear of losing their bairns, fear of offending, even unwittingly, gaffers, priests, factors, and all those whom they had been taught were placed by God in authority over them.” In Chapter Four, which deals with the formation of women’s trade unions in Dundee, the relevance of factors deterring women’s participation in organised groups will be described in full

and assessed in considerable detail.

The possibility also arises that to make an individual public stand was out-with the women's closeted mill culture in the sense that it conflicted with their notions of respectability. Moreover, the kind of protest which was seen up to 1909, that of letter writing and public speaking, was to an extent alien to a workforce more used to its mill sign language, public promenading and spontaneous walk outs and lock-outs. Importantly, the Edwardian campaign for votes for women was not generally leading towards legislation designed for votes for *all* women. Housewives, for example, would still not have won the vote. It is entirely likely, therefore, that many women in Dundee's mills and factories (as elsewhere) stood to gain little benefit from a parliamentary vote.

For all that, there is evidence which raises questions with Leah Leneman's view that the imprisonment incident in 1909 was "the first time the 'cause' had figured in Dundee" (1991, p79). While it might have been expected that the rise in the political fortunes of the Labour Party in Britain would have been paralleled by a movement towards representation by working women in a city which had more women as a percentage of its industrial workforce than any other, by a strange quirk it was the numerically insignificant middle classes who grasped the votes for women cause - even if, from time to time, and for political expediency, the domestic spotlight was filled by the movement's national leadership.

In that respect, first-hand testimony was provided from an aged suffragette, Mrs Agnes Stephen about the visit of Mrs Pankhurst to Dundee. The following testimonies provide a snapshot of the involvement of three middle-class Dundee women and are useful evidence that local participation was present and had considerable impact long before the suffrage period entered its heightened period of militancy.

The first testimony is taken from a typescript of the memories of Isabella Carrie in 1976, when she was aged 93. These were provided for Sheila Cubbage of Glasgow University's department of history. Now Dr Sheila Hamilton, she recalled that Miss Carrie was articulate and alert during the interview. Acknowledging that, the account is provided by a woman recalling events many years distant. The second testimony is a contemporary account of campaigning in the Kincardineshire by-election in April 1908 by Dundee woman Helen Wilkie, sister of the better known Annot Wilkie, who by this time had married radical Labourite Sam Robinson and had moved to Manchester. The third account is researched from contemporary archival material and from discussion with the family of Lila Clunas, one of the movement's most active campaigners in Dundee.

**Mrs Isabella Carrie: "A safe house."**

Born in Arbroath in 1878, a daughter of the manse, Isabella Carrie trained as a teacher and arrived in Dundee in 1908, aged 29. During a rowdy "ladies" meeting, addressed by Winston Churchill in the Gilfillan Hall, Dundee, she became incensed at the rough handling of suffrage supporters by stewards and shouted "something" at Churchill. She was brutally ejected and thrown down the stairs of the hall and into the arms of a policeman. The incident gained some publicity in that the Press picked up on remarks by the policeman that she was the gentlest suffragette he had ever come across." Her reply was: "I did not go to the meeting as a suffragette, but I am now." Isabella Carrie told her story to Dr Sheila Hamilton, who recalls that Miss Carrie felt that "she could not risk being imprisoned" by revealing her past before then (1976).

"Some members of the militant association (WSPU) were there and they came to me and thought I had made an arranged interruption, but I told them it had been spontaneous. They invited me to their rooms." At this point Miss Carrie joined the WSPU but because she was reluctant to take part in public demonstrations, presumably because of her new job as an infant teacher at Wallace-

town School, she was given the task of looking after the small library in the branch headquarters. Soon after this, her father died and she began living alone in a flat in Baldovan Terrace, Dundee.

“The head of the militants asked me if she could have tea with me. She asked to see my house and asked me if I would be willing to give hospitality to the speakers, and she explained that I was a quiet, unobtrusive person leading a very orderly life. No one need know that I was sheltering them and I consented. I was sent word when one was coming and I prepared for them and got the bedroom ready, leaving the gas fire on, food ready if needed, and all the lights on that were necessary. I left the door unlocked and they just stepped in. I did not stay up to meet them as they were usually very late and I left breakfast for them. So I very rarely saw them and did not get their names. One day the head lady called to tell me that Mrs Pankhurst was touring the north and that if she managed to reach Dundee she was to be my guest. As the police were after her all the time, all arrangements had to be even more hush-hush than usual. I had decided to stay up and talk to her, though I was anxious less she were arrested in Dundee, perhaps in my house. But it wasn't to be. Mrs Pankhurst was arrested just before she was due in Dundee. My first reaction was one of relief. But I was truly sorry that I had not met her. Until a few years ago I did not tell one single person that I did it.”

### **Helen Wilkie: “A good night’s work.”**

The role of Helen Wilkie is key to understanding how a middle-class Scottish woman developed into a radical suffragist. Moving to Dundee from Montrose with her sister Annot, graduating and becoming a teacher, Helen Wilkie was much more than a suffrage footsoldier. She was an early member of the WSPU branch in Dundee. Along with Annot she heckled Asquith at Newport in October 1907 and is listed in the *Dundee Advertiser* as the organiser of the Dundee contingent of 300 women who took part in the Edinburgh protest procession that month. She was a member of the WFL deputation to meet Churchill in

Dundee in 1909 and was appointed secretary of the Dundee branch of the WFL in 1912, at the beginning of a period of intensive suffragette militancy in the city. She was also a prolific letter writer to the Dundee Press throughout the campaign, a gifted orator and, by all accounts, she stepped easily into the shoes vacated by her sister Annot who married and moved to Manchester in the summer of 1908.

“As we came nearer the town we saw chalked on walls and gates ‘Vote for Women’ and No Votes for Women’ and so on, but we saw no references to the Small Landholders’ Bill, the Licensing Bill, or Tariff Reform which are, or will be (according to newspapers) the burning questions of the Kincardine election. By and by we met Miss Munro busily chalking notices of that night’s meeting on the pavement. We were pleased to hear that she had almost recovered from the ill effects of Holloway Gaol, to which she was sent for standing on the edge of the pavement outside Mr Haldane’s house waiting for him to come out. We heard the boys singing about suffragettes and suffragees, but not about Tariff Reformers and Free Traders, nor about small holdings.

“After tea we went for a walk round the square and through the main streets. We walked in the middle of the road, and carried sandwich boards as a final advertisement. The large sheets of cardboard were a most effective protection from the rain. I should have liked an umbrella, but I became resigned when someone told me that rain water was good for the complexion. We had two small bells, and their shrill clanging brought the people to their windows and doors, and later to the Town Hall. When we took our seats on the platform we could see the people standing in crowds right out to the street door. It was the first women’s suffrage meeting held in Stonehaven and the people listened with keenest interest to Miss Schofield, Mrs Farquharson Kennedy and Miss Clunas and Miss Munro. The resolution was carried unanimously and as the meeting skaled we felt that we had done a good night’s work towards keeping the Liberal out.”

### **Lila Clunas: “Led off to Cannon Row.”**

Lila Clunas was the second child of Hugh Clunas and Elsie Melvin of Dundee. She was born on September 9, 1876. She came from a well-to-do, even affluent, family, her father owning a large shop in Reform Street, Dundee, which employed 24 dressmakers, almost as many milliners, apprentices, shop assistants, cashiers and clerks. Lila trained as a teacher and was an elementary teacher at Brown Street Public School in Dundee when she joined the WSPU in 1906. She became the secretary of the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League in 1908, a position she held until 1912 (*Dundee Directory*, 1908-12). The Pankhursts are believed to have visited her house in Broughty Ferry on several occasions.

Lila Clunas was an active letter writer and campaigner throughout the suffrage period. She recalled to her sister Grace an occasion when she chained herself to the railings of 10 Downing Street and saw the young Asquiths and their nanny looking down from an upstairs window. She had met Asquith when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. She heckled him at a meeting at Newport in Fife, in October, 1907. At one of Churchill's meetings in Dundee in 1908 she was hurled from her seat for heckling and her skirt and blouse were torn. Grace Clunas recalled, "At a given time, the suffragettes would chant together 'Votes for Women' and Lila was the leader." In August 1909 she was a suffrage prisoner in Holloway. Although described by Grace Clunas as "very small, and really quite reserved," in the Liberal Dundee Press the behaviour which led to her conviction was described as "outrageous." In a letter "home" to Dundee, Miss Clunas gave her version of events....

"The great event is over, and I have been arrested. With a few others I was sent to Downing Street this morning with instructions to waylay Mr Asquith on his way to the House and say we had a petition to lay before him. Would he hear us now? If he pushed us off we were to bring an action against him for assault. I was placed at the back door with another lady. All forenoon, the



police kept on moving the people, but at last Mr Asquith came out boldly by the front door. Miss Hicks gave him the petition. She should have made her speech first, so we were sent back to ask him to give us a hearing. I was moved to the front door as I know him. This time the crowd were allowed to gather on the other side of the street. The inspector went into the house, then came out and asked us what we were waiting for. We told him. He went in then came out and told us Mr A. would sent an acknowledgement. We replied that we wanted him to hear our petition. Then the police came from behind and shoved us, and in a minute more we were led off to Cannon Row Police Station, where the charge was read over, *Obstructing the police in the discharge of their duty*. We have been remanded till Monday at two.”

Lila Clunas and her colleagues were sentenced to three weeks’ imprisonment in Holloway. It was not to be the last time for Clunas. Grace Clunas recalled, “After her ordeals in prison she became weak and she would try to sit near the door at protest meetings to make a hasty retreat because the police were so rough with these young ladies.” Lila Clunas, who became a respected Labour councillor in Dundee, retired from politics in 1950, aged 74. Towards the end of her life, when she “wasn’t at all well,” she told Grace Clunas, “I was just lying here thinking about Winston Churchill and how horrible he was to me. I made him see me once in his office and when I went in he just glared at me with those prominent eyes of his, and I thought to myself - ‘No descendant of Sarah Jennings is going to get the better of me’ - so I glared back.” Lila Clunas died in Dundee in December 1968, aged 92.

These accounts demonstrate the range of participatory activity in the votes for women campaign of three Dundee women in the suffrage movement to 1909 and provide some evidence of a practical involvement which dispels the notion that all suffrage activity in Dundee was imported at this time. Also, in Agnes Stephen’s testimony we can ascertain that women were moved by the London leaders to join the suffrage organisations. Isabella Carrie’s recollections pro-

vide an idea of the type of practical help Dundee women gave to the national leadership. Helen Wilkie's is a remarkable first-hand account of a selfless door-stepping campaigner taking the message to the provinces, while Lila Clunas, the embattled "leader," was chosen by London suffragettes to confront the Prime Minister because she "knew him." In 1901 the population of Dundee was 160,836 (Census, 1901). In 1909 it was estimated to be 172,000 (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1910), of which there were only 553 women eligible to vote in Parish Council elections in the city, reflecting the tiny middle classes in the city. That so many middle-class and professional women took part, one way or another, in the campaign to win votes, is significant.

Thus, to 1909, the evidence indicates an apparent reluctance by working class women to become involved in the suffrage campaign, while, conversely, several better-off and professional women appear to have grasped the cause with considerable enthusiasm. In subsequent years, the response by the two groups of women may have been influenced by the change of the movement's tactics to public militancy, including acts of vandalism and violence.

As it was, there was an interruption to suffragette activity in 1910 and for much of 1911 and the years passed quietly for the movement in Dundee. A Liberal Government was returned at the General Election in 1910 and within a few weeks the national WSPU leadership declared a truce in view of the proposed Conciliation Bill which had the object of satisfying all the parties once and for all as to women's worthiness to have the vote. Peaceful demonstrations continued, however, and while thousands marched in London, in Dundee it was the turn of the non-militant, constitutional campaigners for votes for women to hold centre stage with a number of public meetings. A Women's Suffrage Society branch was established at 12 Meadowside in 1910 (*Dundee Directory*, 1910). Its secretary, Alice Crompton, was Manchester born and a niece of the famous reformer Lydia Becker. The tactics of the DWSS contrasted with those of the WSPU and with the WFL to a lesser extent. In one innova-

tive survey of 41 prominent Liberal men in the city, Crompton showed that no fewer than 31 had "strong sympathy" with the women's cause. Only three were opposed to it (u.d. cutting, Lamb Collection).

Nationwide celebrations on the occasion of the coronation of King George V in 1911 brought a continuation of the suffragettes' truce. But on February 16, 1912, with the Conciliation Bill torpedoed by an intransigent Government, and in a determined mood to punch home the justification of the women's struggle, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst of the WSPU advocated the protest stoning of public buildings such as post offices, labour exchanges and political clubs. Consequently, on March 1 and March 4, 1912, mass window smashing took place in the West End of London and was reported by the watchful Dundee Press, not least because three Dundee women were among the 200 arrested - Ethel Moorhead, a young artist from Ninewells, Dundee, Mrs Enid Renny of Ava Bank, Broughty Ferry, and Florence McFarlane, a hospital nurse from the Nethergate, Dundee.

Renny admitted maliciously damaging property and was sentenced to two months' hard labour. In reporting her case, however, the *Dundee Advertiser* was incorrect in stating that to her "went the honour of being the first suffragette from Dundee" to be imprisoned in Holloway (DA 3.3.1912). Annot Wilkie had had that dubious distinction three years' earlier. After a night remanded in custody, McFarlane and Moorhead were released on bail. At their subsequent trial, both attempted to make political speeches. 1. McFarlane, found guilty of breaking a window valued at £25 at the Post Office, Kensington, was sent to prison for four months and was later forcibly fed. Moorhead,

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1. Ethel Moorhead got her chance when the magistrate summoned to the witness box the proprietor of the shop which she had allegedly damaged. He rose in court, identified her, then told of being startled by a huge crash as his shop window caved in. "Lovely," interrupted Moorhead. Then, to explain herself, she added, "I am a householder and taxpayer with a vote. I came from Scotland at great personal inconvenience to myself to help my comrades" (DA 7.3.1912).

curiously, was admonished and released. Such militancy divided loyalties in Dundee and elsewhere. The Dundee Women's Liberal Association distanced itself from events in London and called for an end to such acts. Mrs E.L. Watson of the branch wrote to the *Advertiser* ... "to express our emphatic protest against identifying the general women's suffrage movement with the rowdies who break windows" (DA 11.3.1912). "Militancy a heroic venture in the interests of women's franchise?" she asked. "This is really too thin - or too thick. The WSPU if it exists for any political purpose at all is out to hinder women's suffrage." (ibid) Ethel Moorhead herself responded in the same paper: "We owe it to the women who had 'reasoned' for 40 years and done nothing that we have got nothing. How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!" (DA 11.3.1912). The following day, Lila Clunas, honorary secretary of the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League, chastised the Women's Liberal Association for having never called a suffrage meeting since 1906 (DA 12.3.1912). And, in July 1912 Annie Kenney wrote emphatically to the *Advertiser* pledging that the "Women's Social and Political Union will not contemplate a truce again" (DA 9.7.1912).

Thus it could be asserted that party politics remained "out of bounds" for the majority of Dundee's adult women, for a variety of reasons. But the available evidence shows that some of them nevertheless played a significant role, and an increasingly determined role, as they became convinced that male Members of Parliament did not consider the women's suffrage issue to be of great consequence to the electorate. Although non-violent, the Women's Freedom League was the most vocal element of the organised suffrage protest in the city, but clearly some women felt that they had exhausted the possibilities of peaceful protest. With electoral hopes betrayed, 1913 brought an escalation of violent action. Pillar boxes in Dundee (as elsewhere) were tampered with in February 1913, an attempt to set fire to a Dundee pavilion occurred in April, and dye was poured into a letter box the same month. Dundee militant suffragettes were then accused of destroying Perthshire Cricket Club pavilion by

fire in April 1913. In May a bomb was discovered in a Dundee billiard room. On May 16, Farington hall, a mansion in the west end of Dundee, was burned down <sup>1</sup>. and suffragettes blamed. In June 1913 there were extensive attacks on Dundee pillar boxes. The Leuchars railway junction building across the Tay from the city was destroyed by fire. Again Dundee suffragettes were blamed, A golf course on the city's outskirts was badly damaged by holes cut in the turf. The city's volatile women were blamed.

The following year, 1914, was also marked by a number of violent attacks. Dundee suffragettes were implicated in the burning down of two Perthshire mansions in February, Dundee's Hospital for Women was destroyed by fire in May, and an attempt to blow up historic Dudhope Castle in the centre of the city was made in June 1914. Such incidents had impact far beyond Dundee and are now regarded (eg by Leneman, 1991 and 1993) as milestones in the suffragette campaign in Scotland.

Ethel Moorhead, who grew up, lived and worked in Dundee, has been described by Leah Leneman as the "leader" of Scotland's suffragettes. Unlike Annot Wilkie, Moorhead was more militant activist than philosophical mastermind. During the 1910 truce she threw an egg at Winston Churchill during a meeting in Dundee. According to Leneman (1991, p267) she smashed a window at the Wallace Monument in Stirling and threw pepper into the eyes of a policeman. In 1912, she smashed a cell door after being arrested for walking out of a public meeting. In 1911, aged 34, she was Dundee's first tax resister, and, in March 1914, she was the first woman to be forcibly fed in Scotland. Moorhead was a student artist who was praised for her exhibition work in Dundee in 1912. Florence McFarlane was a nurse. Isabel Carrie, Lila Clunas and the Wilkie sisters were teachers. May Grant, who was to take on the significant role as a suffrage organiser and letter writer, and later as a militant

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**1. Its ruins remain at the time of writing.**

suffragette, was the daughter of a prominent Dundee minister. Agnes Husband, who had been a member of both Dundee Parish Council and Dundee School Board, was a dressmaker. Husband, who became a member of the WFL's national executive, immersed herself in local politics for the rest of her days. 1.

These were some of the women at the forefront of the votes for women campaign in Dundee before and after the milestone Churchill by-election in the city in 1908. Otherwise, the suffrage campaign in Dundee involved "outside" organisers such as Manchester-born Alice Crompton, who is listed as secretary of the Dundee Women's Suffrage Society (*Dundee Directory* 1910), Cambridge University graduate Frances "Fanny" Parker who became WSPU organiser in Dundee in 1912 (*Dundee Directory* 1912), Helen Fraser, the WSPU organiser from Glasgow who penned literally dozens of letters to the *Advertiser* and *Courier*, and Olive Walton, an English woman who became WSPU branch organiser in Dundee in 1913 (*Dundee Directory*, 1913). And, as with the campaign's early years, the movement in Dundee was boosted at regular intervals by rotational and selective visits by the national leadership.

The massed ranks of Dundee's working women, meanwhile, radical history or not, appear to have recoiled from such behaviour. Jute worker involvement in the suffrage movement is not borne out by contemporary jute union archives (for example, Williamson's operatives' union or the Jute and Flax Workers' Union), and decidedly not by contemporary comment in the Dundee Press. In the rather remarkable total of 24 *Leader* articles devoted to the suffrage campaign in the *Dundee Advertiser* in 1912 alone, there is no mention of the political aspirations of the vast majority of the city's working women.

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1. Ethel Moorhead apparently trained under two world-famous artists. An article on Dundee's Artists (u.d. c1925, DC Thomson), pays handsome tribute to her skills: "There is also Miss Ethel Moorhead, who had a studio in Dundee for 15 years, and during that time, contributed some fine portraits to the Scottish Exhibitions. She was a pupil of Whistler for painting, and of Mucha for drawing, and was herself a most refined and distinguished artist."

Rather, there is little apparent connection between the harshness of life in the mill and factory and what female mill operatives genuinely believed (according to several letters in the Press) as self-indulgent behaviour of ladies from the leisured and professional classes, who, mostly, could risk losing their jobs - if they had one - or even imprisonment. Besides, as suffragette militancy increased year-on-year between 1912 and 1914, the jute industry in Dundee turned in on itself during a series of prolonged and damaging strikes and had adequate concerns of its own to become engrossed in the wider enfranchisement debate. 1.

It can be concluded that available evidence indicates that working women largely dissassociated themselves from the suffrage campaign and parliamentary politics in Dundee, in spite of the high-profile presence of Winston Churchill and the movement's national leadership. Without better contemporary records, particularly those of the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League, there is no evidence to suggest that working women increased their participation in the campaign during its period of intense militancy in 1913 and 1914. Indeed an incident was described in which mill workers apparently set out to shout down votes for women campaigners. In 1912, Elizabeth Scotland, a long-established member of Dundee Parish Council and a constitutionalist suffragist, wrote to the *Advertiser*, complaining about the behaviour of a "drunken, dishevelled woman, shrieking and shouting so as to drown the speaker's voice" during a pavement meeting (DA 12.11.1912). It was possibly lost on Miss Scotland that this was precisely the tactic soberly employed by votes for women supporters in Dundee for the previous five years.

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1. There was a bitter dockers' and carter's strike in late 1911, for example, which resulted in violent scenes on Dundee's streets, causing the deployment of 300 men of the Black Watch. The resulting fuel shortage led to 30,000 textile operatives being laid off. Early in 1912 a six-week jute strike threw the entire textiles workforce on the streets (*Dundee Courier* 3.3.1912). This was followed by an intestinal and acrimonious dispute between the Jute and Flax Workers' Union president and secretary, which led to a legal showdown. In fact, the union's membership, if not its influence, declined, falling between 1912 to the end of 1915 from 9,000 to a "little more than 5,000" (Walker, 1979, p300).

But the serious conclusion which might be drawn from such incidents is the significant presence of friction between the pressured, pressing-needs working women and the ideologically-motivated middle-class elite in Dundee. Thus, it might further concluded that it was not the working women of Dundee - 30,000 of them at the turn of the century - who grasped the political opening presented by the dramatic nationwide campaign to win votes for women. Rather, the evidence shows that a hard-working, vocal group of better-off and professional women absorbed the issues to the extent that they were highly politicised and did much to help keep their cause in the forefront of Scottish politics. That there is little evidence of co-operation or links between the two groups is also significant. The next section will investigate whether the daughters of Dundee acted with more cohesion after the vote was won.

### **Dundee women as voters**

To add to the previously noted data on numbers of women voters, Southgate (1968, p327) has highlighted a consistently large turn-out in Dundee's parliamentary elections. Between 1922 and 1964, for instance, turn-out in Dundee was "always above both the UK and the Scottish average." In the dozen elections between those dates, the percentage of electorate voting in Dundee was in excess of 80% ten times, but only on two occasions over the UK as a whole (*Dundee Directory*, election statistics, Nov 1922 - Oct 1964). The question that arises from the knowledge that the city had a statistically large proportion of women voters is whether they impacted on voting habits and trends. The evidence points dramatically to two incidents in Dundee's history when it could be demonstrated that women voted cohesively as a block - arguably for the first time in the history of parliamentary politics in Scotland. The first relates to the electoral success of Britain's one and only Prohibition Party MP, Edwin Scrymgeour; the second to the election to Parliament of Dundee's one and only woman MP, Florence Horsbrugh.



***“Vote, vote, vote for Neddy Scrymgeour!”***

Following the election of Dundee’s first Labour MP in 1906, which broke a Liberal two-member stranglehold stretching back over 70 years to 1832, the political landscape of the city began to be transformed. In addition to the spotlight turning on to issues such as housing, welfare benefits and the struggle against unemployment - issues where it might be argued that women took a pivotal interest - there was a growing debate in Scotland over the morality and effects of excessive drinking. <sup>1</sup> This had the effect of initiating a backlash against alcohol abuse, and the first Scottish temperance societies were formed at this time. Although these societies had a sprinkling of militant supporters who protested against the liberal drink laws, they remained by and large ineffective pressure groups. The man who provided the political dimension was Edwin Scrymgeour of Dundee - “Neddy” to everyone in the city who watched him rise from being disparaged as a local eccentric to become Britain’s first and only Prohibitionist MP.

Edwin Scrymgeour (1866-1947), the son of a Tory temperance campaigner, was elected to Dundee Parish Council in 1898 as a Christian Socialist preaching moderation and respectability. He fought for the poor and the weak, and, later, as a Dundee town councillor, he was instrumental in securing a rise in the minimum wage of council employees to 25 shillings a week (Southgate, 1979, p310). At subsequent elections he said he stood for justice - but throughout his political career his principal interest was temperance and prohibition - evident from numerous letters and personal documents in his archives. Prohibitionism involved the withdrawal of votes and influence from politicians and parties authorising the production and distribution of drink. The National Prohibition

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**1. For instance, in 1822 the duty on spirits was lowered from seven shillings to two shillings and sixpence a gallon. In Scotland, where freedom and whisky were said to “gang thegither” this led to a dramatic increase in spirit consumption, from just over two million gallons in 1822 to nearly seven million gallons in 1829 (*Encyclopaedia of Scotland*, 1993, p932).**

Party was launched by Scrymgeour in 1900. His Scottish Prohibition Party evolved independently in Dundee in November 1901 and its driving force was its founder. Scrymgeour was its first secretary and organiser and, later, the founding editor of *The Prohibitionist* newspaper which commanded at the time a healthy circulation of 10,000 across Scotland (ibid). He relaunched the Scottish Prohibition Party in 1904, and, the following year, at the age of forty, was elected to Dundee Town Council, on which he served almost continuously until the end of the First World War (*Town Council Diary*, 1905-1920).

The Scottish Prohibition Party was a Christian, independent political party which sought to put forward parliamentary candidates who insisted on nothing less than the abolition of drink. All members of the party had to be total abstainers. Its motto was "Vote as You Pray." Scrymgeour's own politics were somewhat mixed. In turn he denounced the Labour Party, the Communists and the Liberals. In fact, in a letter from the secretary of the London & Home Counties branch of the Prohibition Party in 1928 Scrymgeour was told of branch apathy and that "many do not seem to realise that it is a political party" (Scrymgeour archives, Box 4, letter, October 29, 1928). 1.

Scrymgeour's rocky road to parliament is recorded in Table Two. Suffice to say that he first stood for Parliament as a Prohibition candidate in 1908 in Dundee, possibly because nobody would take a public stand for the total abolition of alcohol at a time when Dundee was probably no different from other working towns, in that the Friday delivery of wages coincided with alcohol intake and rowdyism.

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1. *The Dundee Worker*, a pamphlet issued by the local committee of the Communist Party in Dundee, commented somewhat ironically on the possibility of Tom Johnston being a Prohibitionist candidate - which would "force Edwin Scrymgeour to cease diddling about, to be either a reformist, Prohibitionist or a Labour Reformist" (*Dundee Worker*, 14.12.1924). Tom Johnston was elected to represent Dundee in 1924 and later became an effective Secretary of State for Scotland.

Despite a “mandate from God” Scrymgeour came bottom of his first poll in 1908 with just 655 votes (4.06% of the restricted electorate) with Winston Churchill (Lib) taking the seat with 7,379 votes (43.92%). Scrymgeour stood again in January 1910 (1,512 votes, 9.08%), and in the election of November the same year he polled 1,825 votes (11.35%). He came bottom of the poll on all three occasions. He then stood as Winston Churchill’s sole opponent in 1917, when the latter was appointed Minister of Munitions - and convention meant he had to re-fight his parliamentary seat - but a total of 2,036 (21.8%) against his opponent’s 7,302 (78.2%) was insufficient for Scrymgeour to be elected.

Scrymgeour persevered with his evangelical prohibitionist message and in 1918 he secured 10,423 votes (26.7%) against the victors, Winston Churchill (Lib) and Alexander Wilkie (Lab) with 25,788 and 24,822 respectively. However, in the same election the Independent Labour Party candidate polled only 7,769 votes. Thus it might be argued that by 1918 Scrymgeour had become a serious political figure. Then, from a field of six candidates which included Churchill, Communist Willie Gallacher and the Labour pacifist Edmond Morel in the General Election of 1922, Scrymgeour was elected at the sixth attempt with 32,578 votes, with Morel taking 30,292. Britain had its first Prohibition Party MP and Winston Churchill, one of the country’s most influential and important political figures, had lost his “seat for life” to a man he considered for years a political joke. Against the odds, Edwin Scrymgeour had reached Parliament and he was carried through the streets of Dundee in triumph.

There are contrasting explanations for Scrymgeour’s rise to political prominence in Dundee. Firstly, D.G. Southgate places Scrymgeour’s political evolution down to two key factors, the man’s political zeal for the moral reclamation of individuals and society, and, more importantly, the fact that he benefited from the archaic electoral system which saw each registered elector in Dundee voting for a main candidate then “plumping” for a second. Dundee at this time, was one of the UK’s few two-member constituencies where electors were

allowed to vote for two candidates of their choice. Because a second vote could not be given to the same candidate, the plumper vote was an important factor in judging political mood, especially as in Dundee's case in 1922 the candidate spectrum ranged from the man of God, Scrymgeour, to the man who did not believe in God, the Communist Willie Gallacher. But there was also bitter rivalry between Liberals, Unionists and Labour with much tactical voting, and alliance arrangements. So, for instance, Southgate argues that Scrymgeour's victory in 1922 was due to the fact that Labour fielded only one candidate, E.D. Morel, making Scrymgeour the obvious "other" choice for left-minded voters. In 1923, he says, the number of Scrymgeour plumpers helping to keep him at Westminster was 6,000, while 3,000 made him second choice in 1924 and kept him in Parliament. Southgate concludes, with some justification: "The permeation of 'companion votes' is known. The clear implication of these permeations is that Scrymgeour benefited crucially from the survival of the two-member system which after 1918 was very rare in the United Kingdom" (ibid).

A second explanation for Scrymgeour's unlikely success is that Winston Churchill's downfall was cleverly orchestrated by the active Dundee Press. By the end of the First World War, David Coupar Thomson (D.C. Thomson), proprietor of the *Dundee Advertiser* and *Dundee Courier*, had a healthy dislike of the Liberal minister. He is reputed to have mounted a campaign in his newspapers against him; to the extent that it is frequently cited today that Churchill's name never again appeared in print after their squabble in the run-up to the 1922 election. Although this was not the case, Slaven and Quigley conclude:

"Churchill was unseated in 1922 and it has generally been believed that the anti-Churchill campaign pursued by Thomson in his papers had a significant effect on that outcome. Churchill himself, according to his biographers, certainly believed that to be the case."

(Slaven & Quigley, p205)

A third theory has been aired by William Knox and John Saville (1984, p241).

These authors claim that Dundee's large Irish workforce moved progressively away from the Liberal Party and that, after the Easter Rebellion of 1916, "he (Scrymgeour) was by now beginning to win a small part of the large Irish vote which hitherto had always been at Churchill's disposal." This theory is supported by Billy Kay (1980, p44), while Whatley, Swinfen and Smith (1993, p171) also claim that the Easter Rising released the Dundee Irish from their commitment to the Liberal Party.

These explanations of Scrymgeour's eventual success deserve analysis. Plumping clearly benefited Scrymgeour. His refusal to adopt Labour candidacy and to remain an independent worked in his favour and he gained cross-over votes from both the Liberal and Conservative camps. Churchill, meanwhile, said he "would see the grass grow" before he would return (to Dundee) because of what he perceived as hostility from D.C. Thomson's newspapers. And, in the General Election of 1918, the local branch of the Irish League did, indeed, urge its members to vote for Scrymgeour, as well as the Independent Labour candidate J. S. Brown.

There are problems with these explanations, however. The sheer scale of Scrymgeour's increase in vote in 1918 and victory in 1922 and the ease by which he held the seat thereafter, when the dual system was removed, is not comfortably explained by plumper votes alone. For example, while the electorate between 1918 and 1922 fell from 88,677 to 78,337, Scrymgeour's personal vote went up by almost 18,000. As to the level of Irish vote, Paterson (1977, p158) estimated the number of Irish-born or descendant voters in Dundee to be 16,000. On the eve of the December 1918 election, which followed the Easter Rising, the Standing Committee of the Irish National League of Great Britain urged these electors to vote for Edwin Scrymgeour and the Independent Labour candidate J.S. Brown. The result of that election shows that only 4625 votes in total were cast for the pairing. No evidence has been viewed to suggest a greater Irish swing in 1922 or subsequent elections. Fur-

thermore, a key point to make is that women formed the backbone of the Irish in Dundee at this time. Referring back to 1871, the start point of this study, the Census lists twice as many women Irish as men in Dundee, whereas centres like Glasgow and Edinburgh had attracted more male Irish than female (Census, 1871, vol ii, p185-87). 1.

The theory concerning D.C. Thomson is plausible. Recorded on the pages of the *Dundee Advertiser* in the lead-up to the 1922 General Election is a remarkable exchange of views between the 61-year-old newspaper proprietor and the powerful Cabinet minister. Thomson was a secretive, paternalistic employer, used to getting his own way, the politician claimed. D.C. Thomson & Company's empire then (much as the same firm enjoys today as it continues to trade as a successful publisher in Dundee) included a large stable of newspapers and periodicals, including two daily morning papers, an evening daily and popular weeklies and periodicals such as *The Sunday Post*, *The Weekly News*, *The People's Friend* and, later, *The Scot's Magazine*. According to Paterson (1977, p246), David Coupar Thomson "exercised immense power over Dundee."

Thomson believed Churchill to be an ambitious, loud-mouthed characterless politician. In turn, Churchill thought the Dundee newspaper baron a big fish in a small pool. Thomson certainly used his papers to lambast Churchill's campaign. Successive leading articles (eg October 20-30, 1922) advised readers to vote for Pilkington and McDonald, the Unionist candidates. In turn, Churchill used public meetings in Dundee to ridicule the "curious position of the Dundee

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1. In their study of local immigration trends, Murray and Stockdale (1990, p11) said, "The arrival of single Irish women to work in the textile mills and factories meant there were proportionally more young Irish women than young Irish men in the city."

newspapers” - a position he claimed to be unique in Britain, as he explained:

“You have the Liberal and Conservative newspapers owned by the same man and produced in the same office on the same day...you get the same man behind these absolutely differently served dishes, hot or cold, roast or boiled, seasoned or unseasoned, according to taste, and both brought out by the same cook in the same kitchen.”

(Quoted in Paterson, 1977, p250)

On the eve of the poll Churchill referred to the *Dundee Advertiser* as a “poor shredded rag” and claimed that it had prevented him placing a political advertisement. Thomson claimed that Churchill sought to “buy him off” with an honour. Sensationally, their fiery exchange of telegrams was published word for word in the *Advertiser* on polling day, under the heading, “Churchill’s lies exposed by his own letters” (DA 15.11.1922). Given the animosity of the exchange, it is no surprise that some commentators, indeed Churchill himself in *Thoughts and Adventures* (1947), blamed the Dundee Press for his downfall in 1922. However, what generally is not brought into this scenario is the venom contained in Thomson’s columns for Churchill’s opponents, and most notably, the man who topped the poll in 1922, Edwin Scrymgeour.

Thomson personally detested Scrymgeour’s views and, for many years, regarded his parliamentary candidature with barely-disguised disdainful humour, while regularly advising Dundee electors to disregard him. Said Thomson’s *People’s Journal* of Scrymgeour on the eve of the 1922 poll, “He is apt to hit out recklessly and he flouts the powers that be” (PJ 4.11.1922). While the *Advertiser* was happy to engage in a personal war with Winston Churchill, it was, nonetheless, the mouthpiece of his Liberal Party in Dundee. Furthermore, the *Dundee Courier* was consistently antagonistic towards Scrymgeour and revelled in his election defeats in both 1908 and in 1910.

The electoral system, the Irish vote and D.C. Thomson’s “vendetta” may certainly have helped push “Neddy” Scrymgeour towards Parliament. But voting

patterns suggest another factor was in his favour. During his 20-year campaign to make Dundee a better place in which to live and bring up children, he had established latent support among a group hitherto unable to vote, the women of Dundee.

The object of the Temperance (Scotland) Act of 1913 was to provide the electorate of a district the right to decide by majority vote such issues as the limitation of licence or local prohibition. Though Edwin Scrymgeour was the driving force behind such legislation, the First World War intervened and it was not until 1920 that the first “local veto” elections were held in Scotland. Dundee, the home of the Scottish Prohibition Party, was somewhat naturally the focus of national attention and viewed as the most likely to outlaw the “devil” drink. In fact, there were three alcohol polls at three-yearly intervals in Dundee during the 1920s, each of which offered its adult citizens the chance to end the town’s hard-drinking image. At this time, public concern with drinking in Scotland was due partly to the fact that city centre rowdyism was damaging civic reputations. In Dundee, on an average Saturday evening, there were around 30 arrests for drunkenness (Phillips, 1981, p37). As the *Evening Telegraph* pointed out on the eve of the 1920 poll, Dundee (population 171,012) had 389 public houses, compared to just 288 in Aberdeen (population 162,257), (ET 29.10.1920).

Complaints were made by the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association, who worked for stricter administration of licensing laws, and church groups in Dundee (see Chapter Six). But the level of support in Dundee for Scrymgeour’s abolitionist argument was tied to another factor, the deleterious effect of drinking on those attempting to organise domestic life, the city’s womenfolk.

Thus the drink argument was divided by gender. By and large the women of Dundee supported the No Licence position. This is seen in the quantity of letters from women supporting Scrymgeour (Scrymgeour archives, Boxes 4 & 5),



the correspondence columns of the *Advertiser* and *Courier*, and newspaper reports of cars “filled with women taking voters to the polls” and women “with banners” at the polling stations, one in 1923 proclaiming *No Licence for the Bairn’s Sake*. And prior to the 1923 poll, women tried to bar the path of beer lorries. Women speakers urged a “dry” vote. One, Mrs Mill, of the Women Citizens’ Association, told a meeting of the necessity of every woman going to the poll and recording her vote, “and thus for the first time take advantage of using direct force” (ET 18.11.1920). In return for this support, Scrymgeour believed implicitly that he was their firmest supporter. In an election statement in 1918 he touted openly for their votes:

“Now that women has been paid her political price, it is much to be hoped that she will not disappoint those who strenuously fought for her cause against the Government. Women’s national enfranchisement is a right which has had throughout my warmest support.”

(Scrymgeour Archives Box 6)

The irony is, in spite of Scrymgeour’s outspoken criticism of alcohol and his tacit support from the awakening women of Dundee, there was a No vote in all three polls. The polls, the first taking place in November 1920, offered the public the choice of no change to licensing arrangements, no drink licences whatsoever, or limited drinking in public places through municipal control:

**1920** *No Change* 36,452, *No Licence* 15,491 and *Limitation* 265 votes.

**1923** *No Change* 30,921, *No Licence* 14,884 and *Limitation* 227 votes.

**1926** *No Change* 30,292, *No Licence* 12,736 and *Limitation* 249 votes.

Although the results are patently conclusive, there had been “wide expectation” that some of the city’s eleven wards would vote No Licence and result in dry ward (ET 22.11.1920). As it turned out, every ward decided not to change the law. There was some triumphalism among licensees, naturally, but factors emerged which help to explain the voting pattern. Temperance societies believed the result was due to the “well-heeled, well organised” lobbying of the

spirits' trade. Women workers, said the Press, thought it was because a vote for No Licence might have contributed to the closure of dozens of local corner-shop grocers and businesses around which their domestic existence revolved. One pro-alcohol newspaper advertisement claimed that a "local veto would threaten more unemployment" (ET 20.11.1920). It also addressed women, asking "Do you need those goody-goody people to regulate your lives?" Another feeling, according to post-poll newspaper analysis, was that the effect of No Licence legislation would only prohibit the working classes from obtaining drink. Under a No licence bylaw, inns, hotels and restaurants would have been exempted. Thus there was a feeling that the well-to-do would be immune to a 'No' poll.

Given these negative factors and their potential impact on a large population of women workers, the fact that on three separate occasions nearly one third of electors in Dundee voted to completely outlaw alcohol is significant, not least given women's limited franchise at this time, and appears strongly indicative of the feeling which manifested itself into support for Edwin Scrymgeour.

Looking more closely at the evidence, it is possible to argue that Scrymgeour benefited from the female element in Dundee's expanded poll in 1918, when he increased his share of the vote nearly six fold, to over 10,000 in an electorate which had increased only four-fold. And, after standing successfully in the next poll in 1922, the Dundee Saturday weekly the *People's Journal* was convinced enough of women power to run the heading, *Dundee Women's Part in Churchill's Defeat* above their main election result coverage in 1922. The report went on, "At no previous election have the women manifested such interest and enthusiastic interest...the enthusiasm of the women has been extraordinary....To say that the result of the election came as a dramatic surprise is putting it mildly." Scrymgeour, in 1922, had not only gained the highest vote of any candidate in Dundee's political history, but had succeeded in

winning almost one out of every two votes. It is possible, even probable, that although the total parliamentary electorate that year was made up of 43,054 males and 34,954 females, the vast majority of his supporters were the city's newly-enfranchised working women.

Further evidence of women's block voting in Dundee is suggested if the 1929 extension to the parliamentary franchise is considered. In 1929 women under thirty who were not ratepayers or the wives of ratepayers voted. Across the UK as a whole, the increase of the electorate between 1924 and 1929 was 25% (Pugh, 1992, p151). In Dundee, it was nearly 40% (Southgate, 1968, p319). Indeed, the enfranchisement of all adult women in 1929 led to an electoral increase from 78,297 in 1924 to 109,126 five years later - an increase in excess of 30,000, a vast number of which were women mill and factory operatives who were excluded from the 1918 Act because of age, or because they were unmarried women living with relations, women occupying furnished rented accommodation, or widows residing with unmarried children. Thus, while Scrymgeour in 1924 had come second to Labour's Edmund Morel with 29,193 votes against Morel's 32,846, in an electorate of 78,297 (turn-out 82.9%), this contrasts with a marked improvement in his political fortunes in 1929 when Scrymgeour easily topped the poll with 55,763 of the expanded electorate of 109,126 (turn-out 82.9%), his largest-ever vote.

The post-poll opinion was in no doubt - "Dundee's mill girls had carried 'Neddy' Scrymgeour back into Parliament" (DC 1.6.1929). The jute historian William Walker believed it. Jointly, he claimed, Scrymgeour and Dundee's women had helped to destroy the influence of the Liberal Party in the city (1979, p31). *The Courier* acknowledged that it had long been persuaded that in Dundee the new women voters would be found voting for the Prohibitionist and Socialist candidates. Fascinatingly, it also noted that Edwin Scrymgeour's poll had increased by 71% and that the new electoral register had increased the number of female voters by 77%. It felt that "the significance of the corre-

spondence of the two figures cannot be missed" (DC, 1.6.1929).

### **Florence Horsbrugh**

In the introduction to this thesis, some of the potential obstacles facing women wishing to put themselves forward to stand for Parliament were noted. Indeed, since women over 21 who were on the Local Electoral Register were allowed to stand for the UK Parliament in 1918, only 35 (up to 1997) women have been returned from Scottish constituencies, far fewer than the UK average or countries of a comparable population size (Engender Audit 1998-99). 1.

From 1900 to the General Election in May 1997, there were 16 women parliamentary candidates from a total of 187 candidates in Dundee seats; that is, just 8.5% of the total.

### **Table Five: Dundee women as Parliamentary Candidates 1918 - 1997**

<b>1931</b>	<b>Florence Horsbrugh (Con) elected.</b>
<b>1935</b>	<b>Horsbrugh, elected</b>
<b>1945</b>	<b>Horsbrugh, 4th place.</b>
<b>1951</b>	<b>Miss S.J. Murray (Con) 2nd</b>
<b>1974</b>	<b>Miss M. Tomison (Con) 2nd</b>
<b>1983</b>	<b>Mrs Barbara Vaughn (Con) 3rd</b> <b>Mrs Elizabeth Dick (SDP) 3rd</b>
<b>1987</b>	<b>Rosmary Lonie (Lib/All) 3rd</b> <b>Dr Margo Romberg (Lib/All) 3rd</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>Shiona Baird (Green) 5th</b> <b>Elizabeth Dick (Lib Dem) 4th</b> <b>Elizabeth Hood (Green) 5th</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>Shona Robison (SNP) 2nd</b> <b>Elizabeth Mackenzie (NLP) 7th</b> <b>Elizabeth Dick (Lib Dem) 4th</b> <b>Mary Ward (SSA) 5th place</b>

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1. Representation in the Scottish Parliament has pushed Scotland into third place in the world league table of female members of Parliament, drawn up by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. After the 1999 elections, there were 48 MSPs in a total of 129, or 37.2% (Engender 1999).

Edwin Scrymgeour's defeat in 1931 led to another milestone in Dundee's political history; the election of the city's first (and only) woman MP, Florence Horsbrugh (1889-1969). If it was unusual that a woman was chosen to fight the working-class seat, it was doubly unusual in Horsbrugh's case, as she represented a party that had not returned a member to Parliament for Dundee in 100 years. In this respect, Horsbrugh's role and relevance in the city's political history bears examination. More specifically, the interest for this research is whether gender played a part in her election and whether her long service as a Conservative MP in a traditional Labour-supporting working-class city had a lasting political legacy.

Florence Horsbrugh was invited to stand in Dundee in 1931 at a time of great unemployment in the city (some 26,000 reported in the Census that year, mostly women textile workers). Ironically, her middle-class credentials were impeccable. The daughter of an Edinburgh accountant and granddaughter of a Fife solicitor, she was known throughout the East of Scotland for her war work (Horsbrugh 1931 cuttings, DC Thomson archives). 1.

Horsbrugh's political career began when she stood in for a colleague to lobby support for a Unionist politician in Edinburgh. Soon she was regarded as an accomplished public speaker and was heavily used in Conservative campaigns. By 1928 she was attached to the staff of a Colonel Blair, the party's whip in Scotland. Though her duties were chiefly educational at this time, she took a campaigning role in Edinburgh during the 1929 election. In 1928 she was invited to speak to the Dundee Unionist Association and clearly made a good impression (DA 16.2.28) as she was invited back a number of times.

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1. Horsbrugh had been awarded the MBE in 1920 for service in canteens and national kitchens during the First World War and had campaigned prominently in 1926 - including a visit to Dundee with Countess Haig - to keep disabled ex-servicemen employed in poppy factories (1931 cuttings, DC Thomson archives).

It is reported that she was “unanimously adopted” by the association as their prospective parliamentary candidate in 1930, but the proceedings of the well-attended meeting were held in private. The double vote system which possibly contributed to Scrymgeour’s election success was still in operation in the city in 1931, and though Horsbrugh did not top the poll in that year’s General Election (Liberal Dingle Foot won with 52,048 votes), over 48,000 votes were recorded in her favour, enough to send her to Parliament along with Mr Foot. Horsbrugh’s election also signalled defeat for Edwin Scrymgeour, who had represented Dundee as an Independent Prohibitionist since 1922.

Horsbrugh’s subsequent political career was remarkable. In 1936 she became the first woman to reply to the King’s Speech, which led to her becoming the first politician to be televised. <sup>1</sup> She became a parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Health in 1939, the second Conservative woman (after the Duchess of Atholl) and the fourth woman ever to occupy office in Government. She was made a CBE that year. Although she lost her Dundee seat in 1945 after 14 years following the famous peace-time swing against Churchill, and failed to win Midlothian and Peebles in the General Election of February 1950, she was returned as the member for Manchester Moss Side, the last constituency to poll, the following month. She was made Minister for Education in 1951, becoming the first woman Conservative in Cabinet. From 1933 up to 1936 she represented Britain as a delegate to the League of Nations. She was the first Scottish Privy Councillor in 1945 and made a life peer in the dissolution honours of 1959. (Sources: various biographies, cuttings and two published obituaries.)

As Table Five, above, showed, the Unionist/Conservative party, to which Horsbrugh belonged, put up six of the sixteen parliamentary candidates in Dundee between 1918 and 1997, but none since 1983. The Liberal/SDP/Alliance party

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**1. The gown she wore on both occasions was presented to the British Museum.**

have put forward five candidates, the Green Party two, and the Scottish National Party, the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the Natural Law Party one each. Between 1918 and 1983 no woman was nominated by either the Labour Party or the Scottish National Party. Similarly, of 17 Communist candidates to stand up to 1983, beginning with Willie Gallacher in 1922, none was a woman.

Florence Horsbrugh stood three times in Dundee, successfully in 1931 and 1935 and unsuccessfully in 1945, by which time she was spending more time in London on Cabinet work and in New York, contributing to the establishment of the League of Nations. That year, she was expected to face another woman in Dundee, the Glasgow Labour councillor Mrs Jean Mann. The war led to the postponement of the election, however, and Bailie Mann duly entered Parliament for Coatbridge in 1945. In post-war years, the emergence of Liberal Democrat/Alliance candidates is worthy of note, as is the paucity of SNP candidates.

It is evident from Table Five that women selected to stand for parliament in Dundee are few and far between, with success achieved by Baroness Horsbrugh alone. But closer scrutiny of patterns established in more recent General Elections allows this thesis to pinpoint an increasing number of women successfully putting themselves forward as candidates in elections to represent Dundee in Parliament.

**Table Six: General Elections, Dundee East & Dundee West, 1979-1997**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total No. of candidates</b>	<b>No. of women candidates</b>	<b>Women as % of total candidates</b>	<b>Elected Women as % total candidates</b>
<b>1979</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>1983</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>1987</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Scotsman & Courier Election Supplements, 1979-1997

Table Six shows a marked increase in the percentage of women standing for election to Parliament in Dundee in recent times, rising to over 30% in 1997, though it confirms again, the singular lack of success of any female candidate gaining a House of Commons seat in post-war years. Although cities like Aberdeen and Glasgow have returned women candidates, it is by no means the case, however, that Dundee is lagging behind in terms of women's parliamentary candidature. Table Seven below shows the comparative position at the General Election in 1997.

**Table Seven:** General Election, May 1, 1997. Representation at Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen constituencies.

City	Total No. of candidates	No. of women candidates	Women as % of total candidates	Women elected
Dundee	13	4	31.0	0
Glasgow	77	17	22.1	1
Edinburgh	39	9	23.0	1
Aberdeen	15	2	13.3	1

Source: How Scotland Voted. Scotsman, 3.5.1997. Whitaker's Almanack, 1999.

Note: **Dundee** constituencies: East and West.

**Glasgow** constituencies: Anniesland, Ballieston, Cathcart, Govan, Kelvinside, Maryhill, Pollok, Rutherglen, Shettleston and Springburn.

**Edinburgh** constituencies: Central, East, North, Pentlands, South and West.

**Aberdeen** constituencies, Central, North and South.

Table Seven shows that at the last General Election in May, 1997, a greater percentage of women stood in Dundee than in any of Scotland's major cities, evidence of a growing drive towards female participation and gender equity in the parliamentary political arena in the city. It is encouraging to note, too, that in 1997 Shona Robison (SNP) was selected for a winnable seat, a rarity for women in recent years, throughout Scotland.

Chapter One noted probable reasons for this dearth of successful women parliamentary candidates; among them, lack of time or motivation, selection hur-



dles and geographical isolation. Explanations from political and feminist theorists have been cited in an attempt to recognise the diverse views on why representation is so imbalanced. We saw, for instance, that some feminists put forward a theory that, despite differences in social class, women as a group are subordinate to men. In the Dundee textiles industry, where women dominated on the shopfloor, there was certainly a traditional and distinctive cultural order; factory weavers were “superior” to mill spinners, for example, in terms of wages, conditions and affectations of dress. But equivalent male operatives were almost always paid more, and the tiny cohort of male managers in the textiles industry held a powerful sway over every aspect of shopfloor existence.

Some feminists take the view that parliamentary participation among women is less likely because the traditional nuclear family is a “prison” for women, thereby denying them opportunity. In looking at the position of most adult women in domestic and working spheres elsewhere in Scotland that may be the case, but it is difficult to see how it could be applicable in a city which claimed, for example, more single women occupied households on average than in any other city in Scotland, some 12,000 out of 37,000 in 1901. Additionally there were more married women at work on average than in other cities in Scotland. For example, 23.4% of Dundee’s married women worked in 1911 compared to Edinburgh (5.1%) and Glasgow (5.1%) (Census 1901 & 1911). This led William Walker to assert that, in Dundee’s case, there was a “reversal of economic roles” (1979, p36).

Traditionally, political commentators have also argued that women’s political priorities are more likely to be those which effect them or their families; issues such as health and education. In the context of Dundee politics, Horsbrugh, like Scrymgeour, was closely concerned with the effects of over-consumption of alcohol, in particular the habits of men and women in poorer areas mixing potentially harmful cheap alcoholic cocktails. In 1937, she succeeded in having passed her Methylated Spirits (Scotland) Bill dealing with “red biddy” the

object of which was to prevent the drinking of methylated spirits. A much more complex and controversial Bill which she piloted through in 1939 was her measure to tighten up the law relating to the adoption of children, with the special object of preventing children being sent abroad to be adopted. Thus, while she was MP for Dundee she was the first woman to move two Acts of Parliament.

A gender bond appears to have existed among Horsbrugh and her coiture of Parliamentary colleagues, or at least a gender-based appreciation of a common position. Following her election in 1931, she reflected on “the essence” of being a woman MP:

“Although among the fifteen woman members one may pick out seven or eight who have taken a more prominent part in our Parliamentary life, whose work is more felt than that of the others, I do not think that there is a particular criterion by which we can compare them. To my mind such comparisons are odious. We all work hard and there is not one who is not keen to help the people she represents to give real service to her country, and I can say that equally of members of the different political parties.”

(Glasgow Herald 12.3.1933)

Indeed, from the outset of her tenure of the Dundee seat, Horsbrugh played the gender card very skilfully. For example, in her acceptance speech after being asked to stand in Dundee she pointed out that there were two members from Dundee “and was it not wise and a sensible thing to have one man and one woman?” (DA 20.9.30). That she was supported by the women of Dundee also seems clear. She was elected after a huge turnout of voters along with the up-and-coming young Liberal Dingle Foot, the son of a Liberal Cabinet Minister father and a mother who came from Blair Atholl, Perthshire. 1. Indeed, over 85% of the 109,272 electorate voted.

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1. Foot, the brother of the one-time Labour leader Michael Foot, became Solicitor General in England in 1964 when MP for Ipswich. He died in 1978, aged 73.

Until Florence Horsbrugh's election in 1931 it was arguably the experience of women in Dundee that the lack of women representation in the city's political elites meant that most decisions about women's lives were being taken by men. Thus, in becoming the city's first woman MP, Horsbrugh can and should be regarded as a beacon of femininity; at the very least one around whom groups and fellowships of women could revitalise their political awakening. Her story also marks an appropriate point at which the aims and conclusions of Chapter Two can be drawn together.

**Conclusion:** *Politics and Party Representation.*

By consulting the primary and secondary-sourced evidence, Chapter Two carried the objective of determining whether Dundee's unique gender characteristics, laid out above, facilitated access to, or in some way debarred, the city's women from representation on political elites. To this end, the chapter examined Dundee's party political history; how its Liberal heritage of the 19th century changed not unexpectedly to one of enthusiastic and city-wide support for the Labour Party in the 20th century, built around the industrial transformation and traditions described in Chapter One.

Chapter Two listed parliamentary General Election and By-Election results in Dundee from 1870, and provided analysis of the changing political picture in the two-seat city while offering an insight into a period when parliamentary politics were readily distinguishable from other women's activities, not least in the campaign to win votes, an important facet of 20th century feminist history.

After prospering largely through its textile dominance under successive Liberal governments in the final decades of the 19th century, a sharp decline of the jute industry after the First World War led to mass unemployment in Dundee. From having Scotland's largest female work force, Dundee led the

country in women unemployed. 1. Political activity heightened in such times. The inter-war years proved to be a useful period to act as a barometer of typical political activity and levels of political participation within the city. Interest in politics might be gauged, for example, by voter numbers. In the six parliamentary elections between 1922 and 1935 Dundee had an average turnout of voters of 82%. The figure for the UK as a whole was 73.9%. The number and type of parties contesting Dundee elections was unusually large, including the Prohibition Party. 2.

This period saw the election to Parliament of Dundee's only women MP, Florence Horsbrugh. Later Baroness Horsbrugh, she became the Conservative Party's first woman Cabinet minister and a controversial minister of education. She had been invited to stand in Dundee by the city's Unionist Party at a time (1929) when Dundee was experiencing its worst-ever unemployment - a fertile recruiting zone for her Socialist rivals. Horsbrugh, however, overcame an 11,000 majority to become the first Conservative MP in the city's history. My analysis of the background to this event explained that Horsbrugh's success may have been in no small measure due to support from an expanded female electorate.

Brief mention was also made of Horsbrugh's consciousness of gender during her time as a fledgling MP. Although many factors made her stand out as a milestone MP, it is worth bearing in mind Olive Banks' opinion (1993, p2) that there was a conflict of loyalty "between gender and party" which placed strains on the first women parliamentarians. On the other hand, Pugh (1992, p199) has noted that, "The women members calculated that by demonstrating their

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**1. In total in 1932, for instance, 37,000 people were out of work in the city, half of them women. Average Scottish unemployment that year stood at 27.7%. In Dundee it was 35%.**

**2. I can also point to the number of people waiting for election results in Dundee's city centre, an estimated 10,000 in 1922, for example (DA 16.11.1922).**

capacity to steer legislation through the House they would prove women's ability to be more effective than by raising bills that were most likely to pass merely as a propagandist device." In her time, no woman pushed through more government legislation than Florence Horsbrugh of Dundee.

Chapter Two also traced how, early in the 20th century, Dundee became a key city in the national campaign to win parliamentary votes for women. There were reasons for this. Winston Churchill - Boer War hero and Liberal Cabinet minister - was invited to contest the 1908 by-election in the city, promotion within the Cabinet requiring an individual to have fresh consent of the people. The principal suffrage organisations had committed themselves to opposing the election of any Liberal candidate and, consequently, for several weeks, many of Britain's leading suffrage campaigners, both militant and constitutional, made Dundee their temporary home.

As the suffrage debate developed the major pro- and anti-suffrage organisations established branches in Dundee. Acts of militancy were commonplace, as were protests by constitutionalist suffragists. Although branch records have not survived in public collections, and the women's contribution has been largely ignored by historians, this thesis investigated the extent of the suffrage campaign in Dundee through a detailed examination of contemporary reports and oral testimony.

A key question answered, which contributed to the overall aim of the thesis to determine women's involvement in politics in the city, was that the push for votes in Dundee was focused around middle-class and professional women, and, that, contrary to their "militant" reputation, the city's vast population of working women played an insignificant role. My conclusion here diverged from Leah Leneman's view (1992, p93) that "working class women probably formed the bedrock of the movement in Dundee." A second important question in this section was whether the movement was indigenous or "imported" - sparked by

the arrival of the movement's national leadership in 1908. It was Leneman's opinion that the "suffrage movement was not grafted onto Dundee from outside; from the beginning Dundee women were wholeheartedly committed" (ibid). I challenged this by recording the significant input by incoming women campaigners.

Using primary source material Chapter Two charted how newly-enfranchised women may have contributed to Edwin Scrymgeour becoming Britain's only Prohibitionist MP in 1922, and the surprising election of Dundee's first (and only) women Member of Parliament, Florence Horsbrugh, in 1931. In 1929, for example, Edwin Scrymgeour obtained his largest-ever poll of 50,000 votes. The *Dundee Courier* pointed out that the Prohibitionist poll had increased by 77% and it noticed that the new electoral register had increased the number of female voters by 71%. The paper felt the "significance of the correspondence of the two figures cannot be missed" (DC 1.6. 1929). The records of the Prohibition Party, which was rooted in Dundee, introduced the notion that Dundee women exercised political power by acting as a force of moderation rather than the militancy suggested by the references in Chapter One. The archive was also significantly useful in demonstrating women's concerns with welfare issues generally, notably housing matters.

Into this cameo of a politically interested and motivated city the chapter looked for, and found, examples to support the notion of an emergence of women's political awareness and power. These examples link to the analysis of political representation developed throughout the thesis, while also providing a valuable bridge to Chapter Three's examination of whether Dundee women differed in political presence and activity at local authority level.

# **Chapter Three**

## **Local Authority representation**

### **Introduction**

Dundee women's perspective and performance in municipal elections is important to the breadth of this thesis. Traditionally, local authority representation has been one of the stepping stones to wider political participation. It has also been viewed as an area of political activity closer to women's interests. Thus municipal elections can be viewed as a political barometer of participation in the sense that they can reflect mood and motivation. Often, their frame of reference was the politics of the community and family life; a reservoir of interests which impact fundamentally on women. And, in Dundee, a cross-section of women spent energy, effort and time attempting to erode limitations imposed upon them by established municipal systems.

### **Historical background**

Prior to 1834 Dundee Town Council was elected by the burgesses of the town from among their own number. In 1834, the franchise was extended. Men who had possession of £10 of clear annual rent, or by being householders paying a clear rent of £10 upwards, were allowed to vote for town councillors. This was further extended in 1868 to include other male householders who paid poor rates. Although women could vote and stand in local government elections in Scotland from 1882 (Innes, 1998, p175), it was not until the passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 that women, at the age of 30, took advantage of the local government (and parliamentary) franchise to stand for municipal election (Fawcett Society, 1992).

In 1928, the qualification age for women electors was reduced from 30 to 21 by the passing of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act. The Representation of the People Act 1948 extended the local government franchise to all persons of 21 years of age or over on a purely residential qualification (ibid).

### **Male power dimension**

Since 1918, women have formed the majority among those eligible to vote in Dundee local government elections. At the same time, the city's municipal electorate voted in, without exception until 1935, male councillors - despite representing a larger proportion of women and working women in the population. This compares to, for instance, Edinburgh, which had two women councillors as early as 1918 (Innes, 1998, p177).

From this study's start point in 1870, municipal candidates in Dundee contested nine wards in the city to produce three councillors each for the Town Council, of whom six were normally expected to serve as baillies, with one becoming Lord Provost. Each year until 1915, all 27 elected councillors were male (*Dundee Corporation Diary 1870-1915*). That year a new ward was created, nominally increasing the total number of elected councillors by three. From 1915 until 1935 all 30 elected councillors in Dundee were male.

At this stage, this is also the story of the inexorable climb of the Labour Party in Dundee. There were six Labour councillors in Dundee in 1933, ten in 1934 and no fewer than 18 in a council of 35 in November 1935, when the municipal boundaries were extended to 12 wards (*Dundee Directory*, 1935).

In terms of their candidature for municipal elections it is clear that although women were formally permitted to stand in local authority elections few did. In 1929 Mrs Lily Miller, secretary of the Dundee Trades & Labour Council, made the first of six unsuccessful attempts to gain election to the Town Coun-



cil. That year, in a two-candidate poll for Ward Seven, she was a distant second behind the Liberal candidate, losing the seat by 1,424 votes to 582. The remaining 17 candidates in the other seven wards contested were male.

Interestingly, the municipal poll on November 4, 1930 brought the highest percentage of women candidates ever seen in the city - but only because no more than four of the 11 wards were contested. Two women stood for election among nine candidates that year. Alongside Mrs Miller was the firebrand Communist Mary Brooksbank, later to become nationally renowned as Dundee's Mill Poet and the author of the celebrated song, *Oh Dear Me, the Mill's gaein fast*. Brooksbank, who stood in Lochee, a textile-dominated "Irish" suburb, polled only 555 votes. She recalled in her autobiography (c1973, p38), "We had great difficulty in obtaining halls in which to hold our meetings, but, for all that, our gatherings were the biggest and best attended."

Set against a landslide defeat for Labour in 1931, Mrs Miller could not have expected an easy passage to the City Chambers in the municipal elections to follow. However, she increased her percentage of the vote from the preceding year, a result which lends support to the attempt made in the previous chapter to show that Florence Horsbrugh was supported in her successful parliamentary candidature by a raft of new women voters. In 1924, for instance, the parliamentary constituency of Dundee encompassed 78,297 voters. Then, by reason of the extension of the franchise to women in 1929, the figure rose to around 110,000. Indeed, of the local government electoral total of 73,862, women were actually in the majority, by 54.5% to 45.5% (Register of Voters, 1929). 1. November 1931 saw women standing under three different political banners - Mrs Miller for Labour, Mrs Mary Brooksbank for the Communist Party, and Mrs Agnes Shand, an Independent candidate. They were still only three

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1. After the Second World War, Dundee had a significantly greater number of women parliamentary voters than men: for example, 50,935 men and 65,895 women in 1946, 50,779 men and 65,596 women in 1947 and 65,290 women against 50,990 men in 1948.

of 28, or just over 10% of candidates standing. There were two women among 25 candidates in 1932, only Mrs Miller among 32 candidates in 1933 and two of 27 candidates in 1934 - suggesting that women barely placed a foot in the door, rather than forced a dramatic entry, as far as representation at local authority level in Dundee was concerned, up to Mrs Miller's eventual election victory in 1935. As Mary Brooksbank recalled in her memoirs (c1973, p35). "I came to realise that whoever sat in power, whether in Westminster or in local councils, it did not alter the fundamental balance of power."

In her first year in office, Mrs Miller was invited to join various committees, including gas, electricity & cleansing, education, public health and housing. The following year, with Labour holding a majority on Dundee Town Council for the first time, she was appointed the city's first woman convener of education (*Dundee Directory*, 1936). In 1939, she was joined on the Town Council by Mrs Christina Muir and in 1946, by which time she was a bailie, by the former suffragist Miss Lila Clunas.

Several explanations exist to explain low female participation and success in elections for local authorities. Catriona Burness (1992, p59) believes that in Scotland's case, "low levels of women's representation have gone hand in hand with low levels of interest in improving women's representation." She added, "The preoccupation of the parties was winning women's votes, not in providing electors with women to vote for" (ibid). Besides, in pre-war years there appears to have been some "novelty" value in the woman putting herself forward for election. In an address to electors of Dunfermline's Sixth Ward in November 1934, for example, Mrs Elona Beck, the Socialist candidate, said it seemed that the biggest handicap as a candidate was the fact that "she was a woman." She "had been told twice that day by men that her proper place was in the home" (DC. 1.11.1934). Mrs Beck pointed out to her audience that women had their own brains to think with "and did not require to hand them into the keeping of men all the time." She told them that "town affairs touched women

just as much as men. Women's duties to their home did not end with cleaning and cooking. They had got to see that the conditions in which they cleaned and cooked were good" (ibid). In an address on Women on Town Councils at an "autumn school for women" at St Andrews University, Fife, in 1931, Councillor Isabella Burgess, Aberdeen, enlarged on another aspect of the hurdles facing those women candidates seeking election. "It is scarcely believable," she said, "but it is true that there are women who will not vote for women simply and solely on the ground that they are women, and there are men who also refuse to vote for women for the same reason" (DC 3.10.1931).

Research has also pinpointed the difficulties faced by women attempting to gain election. In terms of parliamentary politics Alice Brown found that "Women in particular are alienated from the Westminster Parliament because it is seen to be male dominated, hostile to women, run in a confrontational and aggressive style, and with procedures and times of conducting business which act as unnecessary barriers for women's participation" (Brown, Waverly Paper, 1994, p7), In later research, she (along with Jones & Mackay for Rowntree, 1999) found similar barriers in the sphere of local government representation. This examined the influences of family responsibilities, patronage and political party factors in helping to explain why representation remained low (1999, p18).

There is every possibility that many women ruled themselves out of possible selection in municipal elections for one or more of these reasons, or others, as general and also specific factors impacted on them. As noted above, the vast majority of women in Dundee during the 1920s and 1930s, had work, and political activity of any description may have remained a luxury for many of them, certainly up to the Second World War, by which time their misgivings remained about the effectiveness of trade unions in the jute trade.

As for those women in Dundee in the 1920s and 1930s who had the time and

inclination to get involved in such activity, a statement made by a male Dundee councillor to *The Courier* in 1928 suggests that a councillor's workload was considerable even at this time, which may have also precluded many eligible and suitable women from putting themselves forward for selection. The councillor complained publicly that the "burden of membership (of the council) was becoming intolerable." In the course of the year, he said, he had had to attend over 300 meetings, "or an average of more than a meeting a day for every working day of the year" (DC. 28.10.1932). Arguably, few women, apart from the leisured classes, could have balanced domestic responsibilities and paid work with council duties.

Thirdly, it can be said that Establishment-leaning politicians were backed by a fiercely moderate Establishment Press in Dundee. Following the General Strike of 1926 the staunchly Liberal *Dundee Advertiser* was absorbed by its pro-Unionist rival *Dundee Courier*. One Leader article in the merged pro-Conservative *Courier & Advertiser* was headed "Soviet Rule for Dundee" and said of the Labour group on the Town Council...

"Last November the Socialist Party in the town council suffered the severest reverse in its history which left it in possession of only four of the 33 seats. It is now attempting to recover its lost ground. When these facts are grasped it will be obvious to the non-Socialist electors how much the election may concern them. They have pretty well purged the Council of the rampant and unabashed wastrelism of administration which municipal Socialism always means and they must now defend their gains or lose them."

(Dundee C&A 29.10.1932)

It was not beyond the wit of the Editor to extol readers to vote for moderate candidates - to the extent of listing their names to the exclusion of all others on the morning of the poll!

What we know of these women who pioneered women's participation in Dundee Town Council is that they came from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. Mrs Lily Miller, the first female councillor, first bailie and first woman on a

magistrate's bench, represented Labour in Ward 12, a working-class area known as the Hilltown, and was the wife of a "salesman" (*Dundee Directory*, 1931). At the time she was secretary of Dundee Trades and Labour Council, and *The Courier* left readers in no doubt where her political allegiance lay: "The Socialist candidates in the Dundee municipal campaign have disclosed their plans. They are to obey the orders of the local Soviet - the Trades & Labour Council" (DC 27.10.1932). 1.

In 1939 Mrs Miller, who briefly became acting Lord Provost in November 1946 (not repeated until Helen Wright's provostship in 1999), was joined in the Council chambers by Mrs Christina Muir. From the other side of the social spectrum, Mrs Muir represented the affluent Perth Road area of the city and was the wife of a prominent doctor. Together, Miller and Muir represented women on Dundee Corporation throughout the war years - a time when the former served on the Food Council and organised cookery classes for mothers in Dundee.

In turn, they were joined in 1946 by Miss Lila Clunas, the elementary school teacher from a well-to-do family who had become secretary to the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League at the height of suffrage militancy in 1912, plus Mrs Agnes Holway, the wife of a chemist, and Mrs M.H. Meredith, the wife of a company director. Mrs Meredith became the town's second woman bailie in 1950. The following year, another woman was added to the list of councillors, Janet Brougham. Mrs Brougham had come to Dundee as a 17-year old weaver of linen, then became a jute worker. She went on to represent Caird Ward on Dundee Town Council for 24 years. She became a bailie,

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1. Mrs Miller broke new gender grounds in more ways than one. While a bailie (appointed 1945) she figured in a piquant controversy: "She complained that she couldn't comfortably keep her magistrate's hat on in the civic pew in Dundee Parish Church (St Mary's) while sitting. The point at the back tended to throw the hat askew, she said. Her proposal was for a different style of hat for herself and any other women bailies in future. But she failed to get her colleagues to depart from tradition" (*Dundee Courier* 14.11.1961).

a magistrate for 15 years and was awarded the OBE in 1970, shortly after retiring from municipal life (DC obit, 20.10.1981).

Thus the pioneering councillors, and, indeed, those who stood for election, came from diverse backgrounds and represented different views, from moderate Liberals to the likes of Mary Brooksbank, a well-known Communist jailed three times in the 1920s during street riots in Dundee. In no sense, therefore, can we deduce from evidence that the drive for political representation in municipal elections came from the vast army of working women located in the city's jute and flax mills. Only Brougham, who stood successfully, and Brooksbank, a shifter of bobbins in the Baltic mill at 11, and later a jute spinner, had long first-hand experience in textiles.

### **Recent trends**

In more recent years, the imbalance in gender representation in Dundee local authority elections has continued. Table One below shows the general pattern of women's candidacy and successful election from 1935 to the present day. The start point, 1935, is when Dundee's municipal boundaries were extended to 12 wards and the city elected its first woman town councillor. The table then spans consecutive decades, leading to the 1995 local authority elections, but using only those years in which there was a general municipal election for all elective seats on the Town Council. Between times, rotational by-elections were the norm. There were full elections in November 1945 and 1954 due to rearrangement of ward boundaries, for example. A general municipal election also took place in 1964, for redrawn boundaries, while 1974 marked the change in local government and the creation of the City of Dundee District Council as an element within Tayside Regional Council. The elections in 1984 and 1992 were typical of the four-yearly pattern of full elections currently in force, while 1995 was a general municipal election to create a shadow Dundee

City Council, which duly took office the following year after the Local Government (Scotland) Act had abolished the two-tier structure of nine regional and 53 district councils and replaced them with 29 mainland authorities and three island councils.

**Table One: Dundee local authority elections, 1935 -1995**

Year	Number of candidates	Number of women candidates	Number of women elected	Women Candidates as % of total	Elected Women as % of total
1935	28	1	1	3.6	3.57
1945	38	5	4	13.6	10.53
1954	69	7	1	10.1	1.45
1964	76	4	3	5.3	3.95
1974	111	11	3	9.9	2.70
1984	146	40	5	27.4	3.42
1992	135	39	7	28.9	5.19
1995	114	34	10	29.1	8.80

Sources: Engender Audit 1995, Election "Specials" Scotsman & Dundee Courier, 1974-1995

We can see that in more than half a century of municipal elections, the total number of candidates standing in Dundee has greatly increased. This is due almost entirely to the number of electoral wards in Dundee rising from 12 in 1935, to a council of 36 seats in 1954 to one of 44 electoral wards in May 1974, prior to the present 33 divisions.

There is little consistency in terms of women elected, however; four in 1945, for instance, yet only one from 69 candidates in 1954. Three women were elected from the eleven women who stood in 1974, yet only five from the 40 women who sought election in 1984. Table One indicates, however, a gradual percentage increase in numbers of women candidates in recent local government elections: consistently over a quarter of candidates in the last 10 years, compared to around one in ten in the post-war period.

Turning to elections held since local government reorganisation in 1974, it can be deduced from Table Two below that the percentage of women candidates

standing in Dundee is reaching the 30% mark, while the number of those elected as a percentage of all candidates standing in election, is still extremely low, around five per cent.

**Table Two:** Dundee local authority elections, 1974 -1995

Year	Number of candidates	Number of women candidates	Number of women elected	Women Candidates as % of total	Elected Women as % of total
1974	111	11	3	9.91	2.70
1977	116	11	5	9.48	4.31
1980	116	12	5	10.34	4.31
1984	146	40	5	27.40	3.42
1988	126	30	7	23.81	5.56
1992	135	39	7	28.89	5.19
1995	114	34	10	29.10	8.80

Sources: Engender Audit 1995, Election "Specials" Scotsman & Dundee Courier, 1974-1995

Table Two indicates a trend of increasing participation by women in more recent municipal elections, but only a negligible increase in the number of women being elected overall, certainly until 1995. Engender 1996 points out: "Before local government reorganisation women made up around 17% of regional councillors and 22% of district councillors. After reorganisation, the overall proportion has risen slightly to 22.4%. Proportions vary from 48% in South Ayrshire, to 6.67% in Midlothian (which represents one councillor)." Finally, Table Three, below, indicates that female representation on Dundee Town Council was considerably lower locally until the 1995 election, when, at 33.3% it was considerably in excess of the Scottish average of 22.4%. <sup>1</sup>.

**Table Three:** elected women as a % of Dundee City Council, 1974-1995

1974	1977	1980	1984	1988	1992	1995
6.82	11.36	11.36	11.36	15.91	15.91	33.3

Sources: Election Specials, Courier & Scotsman, 1974-1995

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1. Dundee was reduced from 36 to 29 seats for the 1999 elections. A total of 118 candidates stood for election, among them 38 women, or 34%.



## **Conclusion**

*Local Authority Representation* posed the question that if Dundee has a position in history indicating that the entire 20th century passed with only a solitary women MP to speak for her majority female population, what could be said of local politics? So Chapter Three examined local authority elections and candidates and analysed whether the women who were elected had a bearing on political activity in Dundee in terms of presence and action.

Although my returns for local authority elections showed women as a larger percentage of candidates and successful candidates than in parliamentary elections, suggesting that it may be the case that women find local government more accessible and more closely aligned to their interests, it is clear that women's representation generally in municipal elections is less than equitable and in need of considerable improvement if gender parity is to be realised. Brown, Jones & Mackay (1999, p18) are among researchers who have concluded that women are amongst those under represented as councillors in local government. Their study supports the view that policies have to be targeted at specific factors influencing the recruitment of women - which would move local government towards a composition which would "reflect or mirror" the community it represented.

It is the case, however, that the figures detailed in Chapter Three indicate a positive and welcome trend in the sense that a growing female presence on the Dundee local authority reflects increasing equity in decision-making areas. From examining many sources, however, it would appear that women's place in Town Councils was not as burning an issue as gaining the parliamentary vote. Rather, women have increased their presence gradually as opposed to sweeping into Dundee City Chambers. Indeed, it was noted that it was nearly half a century after the suffrage campaign that women in Dundee began to come forward as candidates. For a time, in fact, instead of a marked upward trend there was a gradual rise and fall, which may be related to the difficulty

in candidates standing as independents as more and more politicians were absorbed into the three-party system. This trend appears, in recent years, to have been set aside against a more positive increase in representation and more women filling seats in Dundee City Chambers towards and beyond what Brown (1998, p28) calls the “critical mass” required to make a political difference. Indeed, this may be because of what Pugh refers to as the relative absence of party control in local authorities (1992, p58).

As to the difference that more women would make, Brown, Jones & Mackay, in their research into what they term the *representativeness* of councillors, point to examples of contemporary study which indicate “a significant proportion of women politicians have ‘pro-equality’ attitudes and are sympathetic about women’s rights,” but that it was “no means certain that these attitudes will translate into action (1999, p28). It is to be concluded, however, while groups remain under-represented, they have little chance of achieving such goals or of winning equity in decision-making areas. Bearing that point in mind, the gradual but positive rise in levels of female local authority representation in Dundee may be indicative of a presence which broadly reflects such attitudes and sympathies.

As this thesis uses several sites to explore whether the women involved made a difference in terms of political outcomes, it is also important to test for political activity among those women who, perhaps, were less likely than those in parliamentary and local government fora to become involved in political activity. Chapter Four, following, examines whether Dundee’s vast reservoir of working women played an active role within their own environment.

# Chapter Four

## Industrial organisation and representation

“It seems that ‘organise or starve’ is the law of modern labour movements. The mass of these less skilled workers find themselves fighting the industrial battle for existence, each for himself, in the old fashioned way, without any of the advantages which organisation gives their more prosperous brothers. To live in moderate comfort, the worker must organise; but he cannot, because he is poor, ignorant, and weak, and because he is not organised, he continues poor and more or less helpless.”

*(Dundee Mill & Factory Workers, Dundee Yearbook, 1901)*

### Introduction

If women were not present in political office at Westminster or local level, did they play active roles in other spheres of public life? This chapter sets out to determine whether Dundee’s massive force of working women shared common interests as political actors. It will look at the type and nature of the work they carried out, whether they organised and whether they organised earlier than elsewhere. It will examine the launch of Scotland’s first female trade union in Dundee, a period of steady trade union membership increase, and the ramifications of the transition from an era of spontaneous women-led strike action, to one of pre-planned, male dominated, union-led industrial conflict. Fundamentally, it will ask and answer whether Dundee’s millgirls were politically relevant, bearing in mind Anne Witz’s finding (1993, p274), that working-class textiles women provided the first industrial workforce. To do so it will analyse valuable primary source material, including jute records and archives, as well as considerable contemporary data, to reach its significant conclusion.

**Historical context:** As Chapter One showed, Dundee is Scotland's fourth city and for a long time was the third largest in terms of population after Glasgow and Edinburgh. For much of this study period it was a manufacturing town almost limited to a single industry, which itself was confined to a small, central area. As detailed in Chapter One, Dundee could be characterised historically as Britain's most readily identifiable "woman's town," not only in terms of the majority of women over men in the general population - "fully eleven women to every nine men" in Dundee in 1881 (*How The Poor Live*, p113) and 17,521 females in excess of males over 20 years of age at the 1901 Census, for example - but because of other factors and patterns, such as their dominance in the workplace to the exclusion of many adult men, the number of married women employed, and the numbers of girl workers in its predominant textiles industry well into the 20th century. It was, said the British Association in 1912, "pre-eminently a city of women and of women workers."

The rise of a predominantly female population and a working population of women and girls owes its origins to the town's pivotal position in the British textile industries when, with remarkable rapidity, "it transformed itself from the major linen town in Great Britain to the leading jute centre in the world" (Durie, 1979, p169). By 1905, Dundee Social Union was able to show that 51% of those involved in the jute trade in Dundee were women over the age of 20, while 22% were girls under 20. Only 16% were men, and 11% were boys (DSU, 1905, p18). In terms of numbers at its peak, some 35,000 of the 50,000-strong jute workforce was female. For all this industrial depth and presence, Dundee's women workers had a history of poor organisation, to parallel poor wages and long hours of work.

Jute is a cheap natural fibre obtained from the inner bark of plants related to the lime tree which grow in parts of India. Merchants in Bengal in the early 19th century tried for many years to interest British textile manufacturers in the possibilities of using it. Around 1830, some jute fibres were sent by London

importers to Dundee linen manufacturers who, because of the slackness in their own industry, which had led to several factories working short time, decided to experiment with the fibre. When the new fabric was tested and its possibilities for the manufacture of packing materials and backing was appraised, most of the linen manufacturers in the town decided to opt for jute production. Once mechanical problems were overcome (which led to many innovative engineering advances), Dundee proved eminently suitable for the growth of the new industry, notably in the manufacture of sacking and coarse cloths. Most certainly the city's linen industry - which in 1831 employed around 5,000 people - did not disappear overnight, but such was the transfer to the new fibre that, by 1861, "Dundee had a virtual monopoly of the jute trade" (Leneman, 1969, p29) and, by 1911, the number of people employed in the jute industry was 37,937, against only 1,123 in linen (Census, 1911).

The decline of the flax industry and the population movement from rural areas to take up jobs in the city, ensured that a pool of labour was in place and it was boosted by a steady stream of emigrants attracted by newspaper adverts placed by Dundee manufacturers in Ireland (Murray & Stockdale, 1990, p9). The Roman Catholic population in Dundee, which had been only 300 in 1832, swelled to 8,500 in 1836 thanks to this astute marketing (*Jute Federation News*, October 1936). <sup>1</sup> By the start of my study period, official statistics indicated as many as 14,195 Irish born in the city (Census, 1871).

Coincidentally, by the late Victorian period, Dundee had developed into the Empire's most important whaling port. Within the local textiles industry, whale oil was used for "batching" - a softening process by which jute was rendered less harsh and brittle, thereby increasing its applications. Such factors

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1. Murray and Stockdale (1990, p9) say that "by 1791, the Roman Catholic chapel had a congregation of just eight souls. By the 1890s, it was estimated that the city's population included 38,000 Catholics."

led to the jute industry being almost entirely located in the Dundee district. No other major British industry, not even the extensive Lancashire cotton industry, was located in such a small area. The most striking feature about employment in Dundee was the extent to which the city depended on women to operate this hugely-dominant industry. In the context of this thesis, this is a key point. "Without women's labour," said welfare investigators in 1905, "the city would sink to the level of a small burgh - as a manufacturing centre it would possibly cease to exist" (Dundee Social Union, 1905, xi). Women filled by far the great majority of places in Dundee's mills and factories, the four main jute processes being: the preparation of the raw material, spinning and winding, weaving, and calendering and finishing. By 1901, the Census for Scotland reported some 25,000 women in jute and hemp alone.

**TABLE 1: Employment in Textiles in Dundee, Age & Sex Distribution, 1901**  
(Source: Census for Scotland, 1901)

	MALES				FEMALES				
<u>Age:</u>	<u>10-</u>	<u>20-</u>	<u>45-</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>10-</u>	<u>20-</u>	<u>45-</u>	<u>Total</u>
Cotton & Flax	125	125	118	368		551	677	117	1305
Wool	12	39	11	62		1	3	-	4
Jute & Hemp	4007	3871	1601	9479		7401	13,719	3759	24,879
Carpet, hosiery	61	200	122	383		1369	437	150	956
Bleaching	165	868	364	1397		41	43	19	103
Dealers	56	237	135	428		97	239	52	388
<u>Total</u>	<u>4426</u>	<u>5340</u>	<u>2351</u>	<u>12117</u>		<u>8420</u>	<u>15118</u>	<u>4087</u>	<u>27635</u>

Table One shows 27,635 women and girls and 12,117 men and boys working in textiles in Dundee in 1901 - comfortably more than double the number of females over males in the jute mills and factories. 1.

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1. Although a significant number of boys and girls appear in the statistics, changing legislation and rising opposition to child labour led to a decline in child workers in the early decades of the 20th century. In 1891 the House of Commons raised the minimum age from 10 to 11 and it was raised again in 1901 from 11 to 12 (Leneman, 1969, p60). In 1903, Dundee employed more than 2,000 "half-time" children (ibid), who spent part of the day at school and part as child workers in mills and factories.

The nature of women's work in Dundee also contrasted with other cities. In *Married Women's Work*, published by the Women's Industrial Council in 1915, Isabel Basnett revealed that the inhabitants of the "gaunt dreary tenement buildings" in the Mile End and Anderston districts of Glasgow worked in paper bag factories, in clothing factories as shirt and trouser finishers, in cotton mills as winders, and a small number in "charring." They also worked in bolt and rivet factories with men, in rag stores and in office cleaning (Basnett, 1915, pp4-5). In Edinburgh, according to Sian Reynolds, there were large numbers of women in service and, by 1913, more than three women to every man in the printing trade (Reynolds, 1993, p53). 1. In Aberdeen, meanwhile, a considerable percentage of working women were involved in extractive industries, such as fishing (See Chapter One, Table Five).

Other work existed in Dundee for women, but it was negligible in terms of overall numbers employed. In 1893 a "Lady Commissioner" found "roughly speaking" 26,000 working women in Dundee's jute mills and factories. Warming to a sympathetic appraisal of working women in the city she wrote of a "good number" of shopgirls: "It is worthy of note that a girl can serve a customer satisfactorily the first day she enters a shop, while a boy takes weeks to learn." Dressmakers and milliners numbered "about 2,000." There were healthy numbers of domestic servants, and among the new occupations, photography had claimed a "a fair share"; these women employed in "mounting, touching, printing, finishing and colouring portraits and views" (*Dundee Yearbook* 1893 pp 175-180). 2.

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1. Reynolds noted women infiltrating the printing trades in Edinburgh and Glasgow and, to an extent, in Aberdeen "but not in Dundee." Along with jute and jam, Dundee's "other" staple industry from the early-1800s has been publishing, particularly newspapers and magazines. Yet women were never employed in publishing and printing in Dundee in any numbers up to the 1960s, when the total occupied in this sector was around 3,000. One explanation for this might be the strength of the printing unions in the city and their support for male print workers. Another explanation is that in Dundee women were employed elsewhere - in jute.

2. It is safe to assume that many of the latter were employed by Valentine of Dundee, who were on the verge by then of becoming one of the biggest producers of postcards in Europe.

A further factor in the analysis of working women in Dundee is the number of married women in employment. Historically, it was the widespread practice of Scottish women to leave full-time employment on marriage. Elizabeth Roberts (1989, p15) noted that “in general, working class women did not regard full-time paid work as something that they would undertake for the whole of their adult lives.” But in Dundee, where, by 1911, eight out of ten occupied women and girls worked in textiles, a higher proportion of women did - as Table 5 in Chapter One demonstrated.

In 1911 there were 5,639 married women employed in textiles, or about 31% of women over 20 (Census, 1911), when only 10% nationally was recorded by Anne Witz (1993, p275). The 1921 Census showed the proportion of married women in paid occupation in Edinburgh at 5.6%, Glasgow 6.1% and Dundee 24.1%, which it described as “conspicuously high.” According to Dundee Social Union’s investigation in 1905, “The married woman is often the principal, sometimes the sole, wage-earner, and in many works she is preferred for her experience and steadiness” (DSU, 1905, p xii). In Dundee, therefore, the job contract was not severed by the marriage contract. After marriage and child-birth, the job in the mill was still secure. Marriage was not always seen as a natural move towards domestic security.

Data from the 1921 and 1931 Census for Scotland indicates that the high level of married working women in Dundee continued well into the 20th century:

**Table Two: Married women in Scotland, aged over 16 with remuneration**

	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>1921</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>1253</b>	<b>6080</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>1931</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>1293</b>	<b>8584</b>	<b>180</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1921 & 1931



The scale of married working women in Dundee can be gauged from Table Two. In particular, the stark difference between Aberdeen, a city of similar size, and that of Dundee, should be noted. It can also be said with some certainty that Dundee's married working women were involved almost exclusively in textiles.

**Table Three:** Married women in other professions in Dundee, 1921

<b>Author/journalist</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Librarians</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Social welfare</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Chemists</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Transport</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Food, drink etc.</b>	<b>37</b>

Source: Census for Scotland, 1921.

One of Scotland's most important female-focused industries outwith textiles at this time was printing and publishing. If we take that category from the 1921 Census, the predominance of married working women in the jute industry to the exclusion of alternative employment can be re-emphasised:

**Table Four:** Married women occupied in Papermaking & Printing, 1921.

<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>
<b>172</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>32</b>

Source: Census for Scotland 1921

Such factors, combined to technological developments in industry, contributed to Dundee's transformation from a modest and provincial Scottish town into a working-class, jute-dominated city with a turn-of-the-century population of 180,000. By the start of this study period it was known as "Juteopolis" and had 70 mills and factories and 40,000 textile workers, 30,000 of them women and girls. But it was also an industry where the workers, by 1870, had no for-

mal organisation or collective tradition, but where spontaneous strikes, walk-outs and lock-outs were commonplace. Between 1870 and 1880 there were 46 strikes within the jute industry in Dundee alone, accompanying a period of erratic wage movement (Johnstone, 1974, p314). The circumstances were ripe for leadership to emerge.

### **Textile industry structure**

The first consignment of jute to be processed in Dundee arrived in 1838, the last in October 1998. In the intervening 160 years, the rise and fall of an industry was witnessed in great intensity in the city. Jute industry records and one or two written histories allow us to make certain observations and assumptions about working life in the textile industry in Dundee. 1. The 1870s, as noted above, was a decade marked by strikes and lockouts, considerable agitation, and erratic wage movements. William Walker (1979 p20) believed at this time that “leadership was assumed by calendar workers and powerloom tenters” who were almost exclusively male. Up to 1930 at least, men filled the positions of authority on the shopfloor in the textiles industry in Dundee and the higher paid and more prestigious jobs.

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1. A contemporary account of the jute industry in late Victorian years is provided by the verbatim report of the Royal Commission on Labour into the State of the Jute Industry, called in 1890 to look into principally the conditions of employment in the textile and kindred industries, but also to determine whether overseas competition was placing the jute industry at a disadvantage. On December 4 1890 three witnesses from Dundee were called before the Royal Commission on Labour at Westminster to provide evidence on the jute industry to a committee chaired by Mr Mundella MP. Mr J.H. Walker, representing Dundee Chamber of Commerce told the chair that 90% of Britain's jute industry was concentrated in Dundee. The Rev Henry Williamson, founder and president of the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union was called upon to answer questions about, among other things, worker organisation. Representing Dundee Trades Council was Mr James Reid, a jute factory loom tenter, who earned about 28 shillings a week, around double what women workers earned at the time. The evidence of these witnesses is provided in full in the *Dundee Yearbook* of 1890 (DC Thomson Archives). The latter years of the jute era in Dundee is detailed at length in the Board of Trade Working Party Reports - Jute. (London, 1948) It is worth bearing in mind that up to the Second World War, jute was a powerful and influential industry, and nationally important. The best published history for the period to 1923 is *Juteopolis* by William Walker (EUP 1979).

Having established statistically that women were involved in far larger numbers in the textiles industry than in any other, it is important to determine why this should be so. Firstly, jute and flax production in Dundee was in the hands of a coterie of owners, often referred to as “jute barons.” These included the powerful and influential Baxter, Gilroy, Caird and Cox families. It might be assumed that the large numbers of women employed in the low-paid mill work reflected the wishes of these mill owners and employers to an extent. David Lennox, writing of working-class poverty in Dundee in 1902, noted that the true reason for the employment of women was an economic one. Female labour was cheaper and a domestic industry which was increasingly under threat from international competition had to make use of it. Also, it was likely that the owners would be reluctant to change the structure of the female-dominant industry - for example, by expanding male employment - for fear of jeopardising the entire industry.

As to the economic claim, wages were often secretive in the industry, but in 1905 Dundee Social Union’s investigation into 5,888 houses in the city, revealed the following details about household income:

**TABLE FIVE: Dundee Jute Industry weekly wages, c1905**

**Men:**

**Mill:** shifters 9s 4d  
rovers 11s  
preparers 10s 6d

**Factory:** power loom weavers 19s  
calender workers 18s  
dyers 18s  
mechanics 29s  
firemen 26s 6d  
joiners 30s 6d  
warehousemen 20s  
porters and watchmen 17s 3d  
labourers 16s  
sweepers 11s 4d  
assistant overseers 17s  
overseers 23s

**Women:**

**Mill:** shifters 9s  
rovers 11s 11d  
preparers 10s  
piecers 9s 10d  
reelers and winders 12s

**Factory:** drawers 10s 4d  
weavers 12s  
carpet weavers 15s  
calender workers 9s  
sack machinists 12s  
sweepers 10s

Source Dundee Social Union, 1905

It is clear that women fared badly compared to men in mill and factory jobs which were comparable, such as shifting, weaving and sweeping. It is also noticeable that many of the male jobs in the factory were much better paid, including those in authority, although the numbers filling these positions were small compared to the thousands of women and girls filling the shifting, roving, piercing and weaving positions. Male calender workers, for example, were paid double the amount given to female calender workers, while male factory labourers were paid more than any female factory position, including skilled weavers. Furthermore, the Social Union conveniently listed the wages in other male jobs in the city at that same time: these included average weekly wages of 34 shillings for foundry engine-fitters, 38s for boilermakers, 33s for blacksmiths, 34s 6d for shipyard rivetters and 36s 6d for textile foundry pattern-makers (1905, pp35-41). Thus it is evident that wages in Dundee's textile mills and factories were extremely low compared to other jobs in the city, and that the women who filled jobs in jute mills in their thousands were paid the lowest wages (outwith the city's notorious half-time children).

It is also probably the case that the female pool of labour, drawn from handloom weavers in and around Dundee, and immigrants, was suited to nimble shuttle work available in parts of jute production. It is likely, too, that, as Walker (1979, p34) pointed out, because jute was a new fibre, "men could claim no vested interest in its manufacture and, because it was relatively simple to produce, it was difficult to stake a claim to its manufacture based on male skill." And yet, Table Five shows that men, possibly because of Dundee's unique gender breakdown in the workplace and the lack of alternative employment, were prepared to work for women's wages in Dundee - with a resulting loss of status.

Industrial organisation generally in Dundee came late and it was not until 1885 that a trade union was created for the city's working women - albeit inspired by a self-assertive man, after a succession of industry wage reductions

had left many textile workers on the point of “anarchy” (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1888, p97). There is no evidence from the sources available that women in Dundee organised as soon as, for example, the women in the English cotton towns. Liddington and Norris (1994, p84) commented, “Women working in the cotton mills (in Lancashire) could call on an unusually long tradition of both radicalism and feminism, and, by the 1890s, had become by far the best organised group of women workers in the country.” Liddington and Norris discovered (ibid) that “90,000 or more women members of the cotton unions represented no less than five sixths of all organised women workers” at this time, whereas, in Dundee, by the 1890s, less than one sixth of the female textiles workforce was unionised. Meanwhile, other skilled occupations in Dundee - such as engineers, joiners, stone-masons, and brass-finishers - were well represented: “Trade organisations in these callings are strong, and the members enjoy accordingly a certain independence which the unorganised and poorly paid operative class cannot hope to attain” (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1901, p20).

### **Textile trade union organisation**

“There is no effective association among the workers.” So concluded Dundee Social Union in 1905, choosing to omit the fact that Scotland’s first women-only trade union had been established for nearly a decade in the city. But trade union representation did arrive late in this town of women workers, and when it did arrive, it began sluggishly and was largely led and inspired by men, as detailed below.

Its roots in Dundee have never been recorded and, to explore them accurately, it is necessary to examine in short detail the characteristics of two contrasting disputes in the textiles industry at the start of the study period, and then to move ahead to determine the growing influence of the trade union movement. The strikes, in 1874 and 1875, have been selected primarily because they are critical milestones marking the point when Dundee women textile workers

emerged from a period of industrial anarchy flamed by sporadic strikes, and moved towards formal trade union representation and activity.

### ***The 1874 dispute***

In December 1874, Dundee textile workers engaged in a bitter dispute with manufacturers over a proposed cut in wages. Thousands of millworkers took to the streets. After a vociferous and occasionally intimidating campaign, which included a city centre march and boistrous protest meeting, the workers emerged victorious and wages stood. It is probably safe to assume that this type of dispute was commonplace, although the result less so. "The employers as a body were beaten and humiliated by the women and children." "Masses of timid women beard the lions in their den" (extracts from correspondence to the *Dundee Advertiser*, December 1874).

Twice during the dispute operatives at men-only meetings (they had been locked out because of the women's actions) conceded that it would be difficult to effect a compromise between female workers and employers although they advised the women to accept a reduction of 5%. "Females were not behaving with proper decorum," one complained (Lamb Collection, LC196D). The men appealed to the women to accept the wage reduction, but their unanimous view was that the women would never submit to it (DA 8.12.1874). The women continued their noisy public disturbances and, six days after the strike began, the employers agreed to their complaint and work resumed. By this time, however, there was clearly a feeling among the city's biggest workforce that they were missing the organisation of other unions established in the city. This may have prompted one "Mill Lassie" to write to the *Advertiser*:

"I dinna see what's the use o' us women that we dinna hae a Union,  
since a' the men, even the vera scaffies hae ane. Gin we could only  
get some chap tae tak' it in hand (or) twa or three sensible women."

(DA 10.12.1874)

Perhaps it was to her enduring regret that no women stepped forward at the time, but a man.

### ***The 1875 dispute***

In June 1875, Dundee spinning mill manufacturers announced that wages would be reduced by 10%, attributing their actions to depressed markets (DA 17.6.1875). Hundreds of workers walked out and employers quickly dispensed with the services of other operatives who were made idle in consequence. Familiar scenes occurred as mill hands took to the streets - "as is usual when such strikes occur" - said the *Advertiser*, adding that one mill manager had been attacked in a "shameful" manner (DA 20.6.1875). Four days into the strike, however, a mass open-air meeting attracted 500 people. 1. At this meeting, James Stewart, "a weaver made idle by the dispute," declared to the comparatively small numbers present that the most appropriate action the meeting could take was to "take some steps to form an association" (DA 21.6.1875). Stewart was given the mandate to speak - and act - for those present. This he did, urging the crowd "not to hoot or annoy any of the employers or managers but to conduct themselves quietly and peacefully." Within a week of the first lock-out, around 12,000 operatives were on strike from 29 different works (ibid). A second mass meeting of 10,000 workers was held on July 27. Again Stewart presided and warned, "Do nothing in the world to cause riots, or anything that will bring you into the clutches of the police."

Only men spoke at this meeting (DA 28.7.1875). A strike committee was formed - all men - led by Stewart. A relief fund committee was established - all of its members men. According to Press reports, all speakers at the mass meetings in following days were men, and men often as not unconnected with the dispute. In a letter to the *Advertiser*, one person claimed the speakers to be "an assortment of funeral society collectors, tobacconists, brassfounders and blacksmiths" (DA 20.8.1875). Yet, when the *Advertiser* reported the largest protest meetings, "for every man present there were 20 women." 2.

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1. Heavy rain was falling and presumably kept numbers down.

2. The 1993 dispute at Timex had a remarkable parallel to this situation.

As the dispute entered its second month, the untypically dignified stance of the predominantly female striker drew favourable comments in both the *Dundee Courier* and *Dundee Advertiser*, despite the *Advertiser* admitting (or at least claiming) it was under pressure to publish a barrage of letters supporting the employers' standpoint. But when the strike and lock-out reached its fifth week, and the loss to those out of work reached the equivalent of the proposed 10% deduction, old habits returned. Large crowds formed outside mills still in part operation. There were newspaper reports of stone throwing and intimidation. A millworker, Helen Wilson of the Seagate, was convicted in Dundee Sheriff Court of cursing and swearing outside the home of a non-striking worker. <sup>1</sup> As Stewart in particular never failed to remind the women, however, the strike was characterised by uncommonly-good behaviour. At a meeting attended by 12,000 people on August 13, he praised their dignity, saying that the strike "would long be remembered for the earnestness and moderation in which the workers have conducted themselves. I think it will be all the more noticeable for the fact that the great bulk of the strikers are women" (DA 14.8.1875).

It is difficult to pierce the secretive blanket thrown over proceedings by the male mill owners and the workers' self-appointed representatives. There are no minutes extant, and only blow-by-blow accounts in the two daily morning newspapers provide reasonable detail. It is also curious that no history of Dundee makes mention of Stewart's role at this key stage.

Although the women's political role in these disputes is largely indeterminate, it appears that the 1875 strike marked a watershed from an era of spontaneous walk-outs and lock-outs, which were often accompanied by as much good-natured banter as intimidation on the streets, to a more thoughtful, organised and planned period during which male leaders among the town's

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<sup>1</sup> She was fined 7/6d with the option of five days in prison (DA 4.9.1875).



35,000 textile workers began to emerge. While the 1875 strike shows that some strikers found it difficult, after a time, to come to terms with the leaders' conciliatory philosophy, it seems that they were persuaded to remain disciplined until well into the lock-out. Indeed, the *Advertiser* noted that "small groups of females" had formed in various streets and, "with apparent earnestness" had discussed the position of affairs (DA 4.8.1875). On the other hand, the true feelings of the women, ie the vast majority of the striking/locked-out workers, may never be known. However, in a letter to the *Advertiser*, one operative castigated the relief fund for excluding the majority of married women strikers from financial assistance (DA 14.8.1875).

The day after James Stewart once again praised the women, this time saying - "the noble conduct of the women of Dundee throughout this strike says much for them...there has been less disorderly conduct than in any strike before" - the women themselves took action when three from each mill met the Relief Committee. The *Advertiser* commented after the meeting, "The feeling of the girls did not favour a compromise. We are informed they distinctly stated that the one condition on which they would resume their employment would be the withdrawal of the notice announcing the second reduction of 10% (DC, 31.8.1875). As *The Courier* put it, "No surrender!" Despite this opinion, the all-male Relief Committee advised the strikers to accept a reduction of 5% three days' later and to return to work. On September 5, as the dispute entered its seventh week, 12,000 operatives returned to their spinning frames.

Stewart - though ignored in modern jute histories and articles - was in no doubt that a sea change had taken place in the city's industrial scene in 1875:

"I believe that throughout all strikes it will be held up as  
an example which will be followed - that this strike will be  
looked back to."  
(*Dundee Advertiser* 30.8.1875)

Adding to the dichotomy between mill militancy and patient bargaining, but a key development in the evolution of a trade union, was the presence and role of the male-dominated strike committee and relief fund. The fund had raised and distributed £5,000 in seven weeks; quite a contrast with the 1874 and earlier spontaneous street protests. Early in the lock-out Stewart had called for an association to be formed, and, by September, some 3,000 operatives had formed themselves into the fledgling Mill and Factory Operatives' Association - an organisation about which little has been recorded. The gender breakdown of this association is unclear, but newspaper reports suggest many members were male. Certainly, male union representation was a high-profile issue in the city at the time. The annual Trade Unions Congress held in Glasgow in October 1875 was widely covered in the Dundee papers. A meeting by Glasgow conference delegates in Dundee attracted 3,000 men (DC 14.10.1875).

Furthermore, there were already many powerful and influential unions in existence in Dundee, among them the Dundee Operatives Plasterers' Society. 1. Additionally, there existed in the city, branches of the engineers', shipwrights', plumbers', carpenters', bakers' and other unions. It was perhaps little wonder that the "benefits" of a strong union was of increasing interest in Dundee generally. Stewart's public intention was to create a textile association for all: "If 30,000 persons in Dundee and District joined the association and paid 1d per week, that would give us £6,500," he told one meeting in September 1875. To Stewart a penny was the greatest lever the Dundee working class possessed. He persisted, however, in looking more to the preventative nature of such an association, rather than its potential for aggressive tactics against mill owners.

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1. The Dundee Operatives Plasterers' Society was a secretive closed shop of around 100 members who appear to have held employers at arms' length. It was said that no plasterer from outwith Dundee dare pick up a tool in the city. Its members made their own rules and regulations and orchestrated the numbers of apprentices in the industry to suit their own purposes and ends. It was said that as soon as plasterers wanted a holiday they got it by creating a "fancied grievance" in the workshop (DA 12.10.1875).

In this he was joined by the most influential figure of women's unionism in the city's history, the Reverend Henry Williamson (1839-1925), a Universalist Church minister who had arrived in Dundee in 1866.

Henry Williamson, a prominent member of Dundee School Board, bided his time as 25,000 women operatives examined the Mill & Factory Operatives' Association with apparent suspicion. And, as with several other unions of the unskilled, it was ephemeral; its early popularity and influence apparently quickly waning. In August 1885 Williamson held a workers' meeting following another major textiles walk-out over a proposed cut in wages brought about by the depressed state of the jute market. Williamson viewed the stoppage as a kneejerk reaction to the employers themselves forming a loose association to administer the wage reduction. At his invitation, many locked-out women attended the meeting and a resolution was adopted in favour of forming the city's first official textiles trade union.

### **Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives' Union**

In 1885, and largely as a result of the sporadic strikes in the autumn of that year following the jute owners' decision to reduce wages - one factory on five occasions between 1884 and 1886 - Henry Williamson organised a number of women textile workers into an official union which he called the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives' Union. According to the *Dundee Year-book* (1888 p97), he had "conferences with many of the persons on strike, and succeeded in persuading them in all cases to return to their employment, but with the understanding that he would make an effort to form a union."

Henry Williamson's own account of what happened was contained in his reminiscences published much later:

“When walking down the Lochee road in those days it seemed to me that never a week passed without presenting at some part of the route the same sad familiar scene - a band of tousled, loud-voiced lassies with the light of battle in their defiant eyes gathered together in the street and discussing with animation and candour the grievances that had constrained them to leave work. To me it was a sad sight.”

(People's Journal, 14.10.1922)

Williamson told his readers in 1922 that, in 1885, the mill girls “were without organisation” and he likened them to a flock of sheep without a shepherd. (ibid). In September 1885 another meeting was held to adopt the constitution and rules of the new union. Its objects were to look after wages and other interests of workers, to provide funds in case of accident, to protect members if they were unjustly treated and to look after their interests in case of a breakdown in machinery (DA 9.9.1885). Henry Williamson, carpenter turned minister, born in Goldalming, Surrey, was named the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union's Honorary President. In evidence to the Royal Commission in London in 1890, Williamson confirmed the foregoing:

“In the year 1885 the manufacturers of Dundee resolved to reduce wages by 5 per cent, and a great amount of sympathy was expressed for employees. Most of the workers had families, and it was difficult to find any one willing to come forward and study their case and present their claims before the public. I, among others, was asked to give my advice to a number of families on strike, and to see if it was not possible to induce the manufacturers to change their decision. I strongly advised the women to return to their employment, and undertook to do what I could to organise the Union, whose object it was to recover the wages that had been taken off.”

(Royal Commission 1890, p133)

Besides some reports in the Dundee Press, the only surviving contemporary records of the MFOU are a few copies of its newsletter, the *Mill & Factory Herald*, which Williamson edited and most probably wrote. It seems that from the outset, however, The Mill & Factory Operatives' Union was intended to be a women's association, and it quickly gained the blessing of the Women's Pro-

tective and Provident League of London (*Mill & Factory Herald*, May 1886). Williamson later recalled that the adopted resolution was to form a union “especially for girls and women; because girls and women were the only kinds of workers who came out on strike. Men at the time did not strike and cause the whole town to be idle” (*Herald*, November 1914). As with Stewart the previous decade, Williamson felt he was championing women’s interests. “We took up the cause of women and girls engaged in the staple trade of the town because they had no one who dared to speak for them” (*Herald*, May 1886). “How did it happen that a minister became leader of unorganised girls and women? Because no other person offered to do it” (*Herald*, Nov, 1914). Commenting on the union’s activities in its third year of existence, the *Dundee Yearbook* was impressed: “At the beginning it was found to be impossible to persuade females to become members of the Committee. That, however, is not now the case, for the Vice-President, Secretary, and nearly the whole of the committee are females” (1888, p97). 1.

What can be gleaned with some certainty from Williamson’s long leadership of the union is his politics of restraint. In spite of the women’s tradition of spontaneous collective action, Williamson was anxious to avoid industrial disputes at any cost and to convene negotiations to places of negotiation and not to street corners. “The promoters of the Union are most anxious to avoid a strike” (*Herald*, Sept 1885). He told the Royal Commission in 1890 that there were strikes in the industry, then added, “But we have never had strikes” (RC 1890, p133). Indeed, the MFOU was unique because of its no-strike policy. This may be the reason that, despite Williamson’s stated aim of giving every woman

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1. This situation was confirmed by Williamson’s own memories in 1922 - he recalled that the majority of mill workers were unwilling at first to participate in union affairs. Although there was a spirit in the girls “to fight for their rights”.... “not one could I persuade to accept office on the (new) committee.”

in the city a wage of at least 15 shillings a week in 1889 (*Herald*, Nov 1889), support for the union was patchy. A letter to the *Herald*, possibly penned by Williamson himself, made mention of the obvious disappointment that numbers were not greater - "It is now about nine months since the Union was set a-going. Have the workers taken advantage of it as they ought to have done? If they had, we would have 20,000 names on our books, instead of three or four thousand" (*Herald*, May 1886).

In evidence to the Royal Commission he gave the total membership in the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union as 5,945 in 1889, hardly an insignificant figure given the union's short lifespan and its intended membership. When asked by the commission chairman whether all were women, Williamson replied, "About 12% are men, about 600." In 1891 his union had attracted 5,360 members. In 1901 the figure was 6,977 and in the year ended 1905, it stood at 6,425 (Lennox, 1905, p178). Taking the 1901 membership figures, and the Census total of 39,752 men and women in textiles in Dundee in 1901 (see Table One), the percentage of women working in Dundee's textiles industry belonging to the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union was 17.9%. If jute is taken separately, the figure represents in excess of 20% of the female workforce. This mirrors the union's claim in 1905 that it represented 9.6% of total males and 21.4% of females engaged in mill and factory work (*ibid*).

Thus, some four out of five women textile workers remained beyond formal trade union representation at this time. There are several reasons as to why this was the case. Wages were low in the industry and the weekly payment to the union may have been considered too expensive, for scant return. Weekly contributions were set at 1d, for single, 2d for double and 3d for triple benefits (Lennox, 1905, p178). The possibility also exists that, given the length of the working day and domestic responsibilities, some women had no time to take part in union activities. There exists the possibility also that some were apathetic towards its aims and objectives, certainly while it was unproven.

Furthermore, both Williamson in his *Herald* and the *Dundee Yearbook* cited the fact that operatives may not have wanted to risk an association with the union for fear of losing their jobs; "There is danger in any individual doing much to advocate the Union cause without exciting attention which may lead to loss of employment" (*Herald*, May 1886). Another potential barrier to winning women's support was Williamson's outspoken support of the half-time system of education, which saw children spend half a day at school before working in the mill. Williamson believed this to be an appropriate method to enhance education while combating poverty. It led to sharp criticism from some women workers who believed he was perpetuating the mill owners' wishes. In fact, Williamson, as a member of Dundee School Board, had "helped to establish an evening school for juvenile textile workers" (Dundee Trades Council, 1982, Lamb 265/21).

What is likely to have prevented more widespread support, however, was Williamson's insistence on adopting any form of conciliation or arbitration that would avoid a damaging strike. This, for generations of women mill workers, suited manufacturers, and indeed, it is the case that the Mill & Factory Operatives' Union was given tacit acceptance by the jute owners, a fact that Williamson recalled with pride in 1922 - "conciliation as a means of securing redress for grievances was our guiding principle as opposed to the alternatives of strikes" (PJ. 14.10.1922). He believed strikes were impotent because the mill women habitually went back with no redress to specific grievances and often at a financial loss. The most important role, therefore, was one of intermediary. Damaging strikes continued in the industry, however, and they led directly to the formation, in 1906, of a rival workers' organisation.

If not wholly in terms of numbers, Williamson's women's union was ultimately a success possibly in terms of wages and conditions. Williamson claimed that 33% of the increase in mill wages between 1885 and 1914 were brought about by his union (PJ 14.10.1922). In November 1889 he told *Herald* readers that

"You and many others in Dundee and district are perhaps getting a shilling a week more than you would have been receiving if there had been no Union." A year later he told Royal Commission members, "Wages are now 30% higher in Dundee than they were in 1880" (RC,1890, p133). By 1911, the union had distributed £19,000 to needy members and Williamson believed that such benefits were possible only because of his no-strike stance.

Significantly, Williamson's union also brought a breakthrough in gender participation and representation, pushing working women to the forefront in Dundee for the first time by facilitating their presence on committees and thereby raising their status in the workplace and public consciousness. Although the MFOU allowed male members from as early as 1886, the union by and large comprised four-fifths working women, and women outnumbered men on its executive committee throughout its lifespan, probably a unique situation in Scotland. Yet if it was embraced by many women, similarly the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union was cold shouldered by the Dundee Trades Council and local branch of the Independent Labour Party, which bears out the view of historians such as Martin Pugh (1993, p5) that male trade unionists were antagonistic towards female members, and feminist views in particular. When it was put to him by the Royal Commission chairman that Dundee Trades Council did "not want to interfere with the women's union," the council's representative in London replied that, "We do not particularly desire to interfere with it" (RC 1890, p138). Williamson himself lamented the fact that the city's existing male trade unions had not helped him establish his women's union, recalling in 1922, "A measure of sympathy might have been expected from the Trade Unionists of the town, but they stood aloof and offered no help" (PJ 14.10.1922).

Part of this arms-length relationship must be put down to Williamson's own character and background. He was clearly a champion of the poor in his own way, and, at times, did not hesitate to criticise working conditions which he



believed harmed his membership: in 1886, for instance, he wrote: "It is time attention was called to a practice which is carried out in some public works of filling the places of women who are compelled to stay at home for a day or more through illness. One may hear of girls struggling on with their work for fear their places would be filled up." This practice he called "heartless officialism" (*Herald* May, 1886).

Williamson also carried missionary zeal into his union activities. Although the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union was established originally to support Dundee textile workers, it gradually attracted members from further afield. By 1888, it had branches in Alyth, Monifieth and Montrose as well as members elsewhere. By 1888, for instance, Williamson was persuading striking textile workers in Arbroath to return to work:

"The Hon. President addressed the persons on strike, and offered them the privileges of the Dundee Union. The workers accepted the offer, and ultimately over a thousand were enrolled. The local Committee in Arbroath consists entirely of females."

(Dundee Yearbook, 1888, p98)

It was such a stance in 1895 that lost him the support of many workers in Dundee and which led to Dundee Trades Council stepping in to act as mediator, thereby sowing the seeds of the trials to come. The damaging textiles dispute of that year, in which 18,000 went out on strike and a further 10,000 were thrown idle, might have been the opportunity for Williamson and his women's union to emerge as a powerbroker in industrial relations in the city. As it turned out, his willingness to support a wage demand while, at the same time, his enthusiasm to persuade striking workers to return to work contributed to him losing credibility and the mantle of trade union power falling to a new group.

Henry Williamson was president of the Dundee Mill and Factory Operatives' Union for 33 years and was succeeded by another man, then another, as the union lived on, in name at least, "until the Trades Council was notified in 1951

that it was no more" (Dundee Trades Council, 1982). In a series of recollective articles published in the *People's Journal* in 1922, three years before his death and when he had finally given up leadership of the union, he testified to the "unwillingness" of the millgirls to participate actively in union affairs. He had noted in 1889: "When a strike is on the audacity and courage of the girls and women surprise everybody, and it is easy to think that they are just as ready to assert their rights at ordinary times. But they are not. They put up with many things they feel are unfair and even unjust and are afraid to make a fuss" (*Herald*, Nov 1889). In fact, after interceding and acting on their behalf many times, Williamson won the confidence of many of the city's women and placed his union on a sure working footing. He opened an office for them and women workers made their complaints to his secretarial staff. He was mindful that the women who enlisted in his organisation risked their careers; "Women are naturally unwilling to be known as taking part in agitation and it is not easy to get them to take part in a movement of the sort because they are afraid of the consequences. It is thought that the managers and foremen are not disposed to encourage women who are engaged in anything like labour organisation" (RC 1890, p133).

It was presumably a difficult and trying challenge, but one which he carried out with widespread women's support for over 20 years, the latter period when he came under the severest pressure from a new and dynamic textile organisation, the Dundee & District Jute and Flax Workers' Union. That he led the workers for so long may also be looked upon as a criticism of the lack of enthusiasm and motivation among the women operatives, or, at best, as indifference towards the union. But Williamson, who died in 1925, firmly believed that the workers "were incapable of looking to their own interest without an educated leadership possessed of good connections."

The *Piper o' Dundee*, a short-lived weekly satirical publication, noted: "To the Rev Henry Williamson, more than any other, is due the credit of leading the

forlorn hope, which succeeded in conquering the prejudices of the workers themselves against banding together in their own interests" (30.1.1889). Moreover, Williamson appeared popular with the women he sought to lead and at one point he commented proudly that his committee was composed "almost entirely" of female workers (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1891). He remained a clergyman and conducted union business in the evening, on a voluntary basis. At a special ceremony in the Victoria Hall in March 1889 the union's membership presented him with a silver salver and a purse containing 60 sovereigns in appreciation of his "earnest labours" on their behalf. He was told that the membership had "never lost their confidence in him and never would (applause) so long as he continued to advocate the rights of working people." His deputy (a woman) remarked to more applause that "no member of the union had a word to say against him."

Although he could attract only the paid-up support of some 6,000 Dundee workers - not an insignificant amount given difficulties of organisation and antagonism from male unions - Williamson clearly believed he was a success as a union president. In as such he pioneered female organisation and helped it progress he was probably correct. At one stage he forecast: "A Member of Parliament is not altogether beyond our reach." (Presumably he was thinking of himself.)

### **Dundee and District Jute and Flax Workers' Union**

It is worth noting again that the presence of Williamson's existing union did not prevent strikes occurring in the jute industry and that non-unionists, the majority in Dundee, could still take matters into their own hands. There were major strikes in 1893 when 15,000 workers walked out over a threatened reduction in wages; in 1895 when 18,000 were on strike and a further 10,000 were thrown idle over a demand for a 10% rise; in 1898 when three works were closed; and in 1899 when 35,000 workers were locked out. But it was a

strike early in 1906 which finally highlighted the inadequacies of Williamson's organisational powers and paved the way for a far more militant women's textiles union to evolve in Dundee.

In February 1906, Williamson, on behalf of the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union (inevitably pressed by his women's committee to do so), petitioned the mill owners to provide a 5% increase in wages "across the board." The owners refused and a strike developed, firstly involving the lower hands in one or two mills, then gathering momentum to involve around a dozen mills. By this time, Williamson viewed the masters' refusal as a signal to back off. Under a *Dundee Courier* notice headed *Advice to Workers*, he told his 6,000-strong flock, "I sincerely and anxiously hope that the workers of Dundee will not do anything rash in the way of leaving work as a result of the masters' decision to give no advance of wages." If this was anathema to militant women, the *Courier's* report made matters only worse: "Throughout the whole course of the interview which our representative had with Mr Williamson last night, that gentleman time and time again repeated the hope that employees would abstain from leaving their work" (DC, 20.2.1906).

However, because Williamson privately, and at public meetings, was telling vast crowds of strikers that there "was no shadow of doubt" that the average wage was "not anything like it ought to be," there was a factory-floor inclination to push the employers further - not least when the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union committee let it be recorded in print that they "condemned the action of those workers who had gone on strike."

Importantly, and in contrast, the fledgling Labour Party in Dundee passed a key resolution condemning the action of the masters in refusing to concede a rise (DC 26.2.1906). By Friday February 23, five establishments were at a standstill and 6,000 operatives had been made idle. The following Monday, 15,000 were on strike, and, a day later, 34 establishments were closed with

22,700 on the streets (DA 28.2.1906). After a total of nine days of protest marches and meetings, the strike ended with the mill owners agreeing to give the lower paid workers - spinners and preparers - the 5% which had been requested. Williamson had got his tactics wrong.

What contributed to Williamson's embarrassment was his misjudgment in publicly welcoming the rise for lower-paid workers. Two days later 15,000 better-paid pieceworkers, mostly weavers and winders, walked out, insisting that they were as much entitled to a 5% wage increase as the lower-paid spinners. Williamson was unsympathetic. The *Courier* reported that he was "not surprised that they (the employers) had closed their works if the strike should continue. If there was no union, there might be some reason for staying away from work" (DC 3.3.1906). He was of course more conciliatory at mass public meetings, but what Williamson found was that those remarks which pleased the spinners were distasteful to the pieceworkers. The newspapers were quick to acknowledge his discomfort. After another large meeting, the *Courier* reported: "On inquiring if they were willing to follow his advice, there were shrill cries of Yes, and a counter roar of No" (DC 6.3.1906). Furthermore, for the first time, Williamson found many disenchanted workers on the streets as union funds began to be drained by benefit payments. By the time the dispute ended on Monday March 7, it was estimated that the strike had cost the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union £2,000 (DA 8.3.1906).

The outcome of the 1906 dispute was a humiliating set-back for the Rev Henry Williamson. On the day of the settlement, Mary Macarthur sent a telegram to Dundee Trades Council offering her help. At this time, Macarthur was the influential general secretary of the Women's Trade Union League and a leading light in the emerging Labour movement. She was of the opinion that Williamson's dictatorial position was undemocratic and that a new union of women workers was required. There was a debate within the Trades Council committee as to whether it was one of Macarthur's jobs to organise workers. They

agreed it was, and unanimously resolved to ask her to come to Dundee (DC 1.3.1906). Macarthur duly arrived in the city and proposed a new union for the workers at a meeting on March 7, which included a "large attendance of female workers." The *Courier* saw the development as a "result of the strike" (8.3.1906).

Macarthur prophesised that, if her dreams were realised, within six months the "new union would take over the old." Her biography noted (*The Bundle of Sticks*, p52) "The actual demand for a 5 per cent rise had been put forward by an undemocratic association run by an irresponsible individual. It had, moreover, been accompanied by a statement that there was no intention of striking if the demand were refused." Another meeting the following night was "packed from floor to ceiling" drawing a remark from Macarthur that "never in the course of her experience had she come across workers who had to labour under such conditions such as existed amongst the millworkers in Dundee" (DC, 9.3.1906). In fact, it was the Labour movement which was beginning to take a serious interest in the textile operatives. The newly-elected Dundee MP Alexander Wilkie headed north and advocated the necessity of having a "complete and thorough" organisation so that they would have a better means of settling their case "than existed at present," a barely-disguised attack on Williamson's 6,000-strong union. Keir Hardie himself took an interest. The *Courier* reported the Labour leader saying, "I am glad to see that the girls have broken away from the Rev Henry Williamson. So long as the girls would not strike there was no chance of an increase being given" (DC 28.2.1906).

The role of Dundee Trades Council was paramount in the formation of the new union and the new union's minutes record that it was in alliance with the Trades Council that "a practical trade union for the support of jute and flax operatives" was launched (JFWU executive committee minutes 3.4.1906). It is regrettable that contemporary Dundee Trades Council records have not survived. Conveniently, Williamson was not affiliated to the Trades Council

because, in his capacity as leader of the operatives' union, he was not a working representative of the jute industry.

The Dundee & District Jute and Flax Workers' Union was formed on March 13 1906 with an entrance fee of 6d and weekly subscriptions of 2d, 3d and 4d, depending on benefits required (Minutes 3.4.1906). Women operatives were heavily involved in the union's creation and activities from the outset. At the first meeting a steering committee of 15, comprising eight women and seven men was nominated and elected, and they agreed to "form a practical trade union" (ibid) They agreed a provisional committee of 25 persons, 15 women and 10 men. A proposal to keep married women off the committee was "not entertained" (Minutes, 13.3.1906).

Macarthur urged the city's woman jute workers to take a more combative stance against manufacturers as an alternative to Williamson's appeasement and the union found a speedy acceptance: around 3,000 workers joined in the first instance. By the committee's meeting on August 10, 1906, membership stood at nearly 4,000. By this time, however, the development and running of the union had fallen into the path of two men, its honorary president John Sime, and honorary secretary Nicholas Marra, the latter a leading member of the Independent Labour Party. Women, for the most part, formed the majority of the committee and the positions of vice-president and treasurer.

Although Walker (1979, p289) believed it was "the fact of the union's existence together with its sheer size which drew it into politics, rather than any positive desire for activity in that field," from the outset the JFWU was politicised in a manner never achieved by Williamson's rival union. It was controlled by men in politics, like the ILP's Marra and several male Prohibitionists, and set a political agenda by seeking Labour support - forging close links with local MP Alexander Wilkie, Dundee Trades Council and, early in 1907, the emerging Labour Representation Committee. This was a path which was to set it at

loggerheads with the jute barons in a way never witnessed by Williamson, and an examination of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union committee minutes and letter books suggest it was the male powerbase of the union which led to the onset of a fractious relationship with Dundee's textile hierarchy.

William Walker obtained figures of membership for both the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union and the Jute and Flax Workers' Union for the period to 1910. These he put forward as follows, based on Board of Trade reports:

**Table Six: Mill & Factory Operatives' Union: membership 1896-1910.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>1896</b>	<b>1500</b>	<b>3500</b>
<b>1897</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>4594</b>
<b>1898</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>4243</b>
<b>1900</b>	<b>1091</b>	<b>5921</b>
<b>1901</b>	<b>1131</b>	<b>5846</b>
<b>1902</b>	<b>1173</b>	<b>6020</b>
<b>1903</b>	<b>1022</b>	<b>5501</b>
<b>1904</b>	<b>979</b>	<b>5446</b>
<b>1905</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>5180</b>
<b>1906</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>5090</b>
<b>1907</b>	<b>1089</b>	<b>5171</b>
<b>1908</b>	<b>1151</b>	<b>5326</b>
<b>1909</b>	<b>1191</b>	<b>5256</b>
<b>1910</b>	<b>1226</b>	<b>5111</b>

**Table Seven: Jute & Flax Workers' Union membership 1906-1910**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>1906</b>	<b>1320</b>	<b>2644</b>
<b>1907</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>2247</b>
<b>1908</b>	<b>1243</b>	<b>2485</b>
<b>1909</b>	<b>1367</b>	<b>3001</b>
<b>1910</b>	<b>1097</b>	<b>4000</b>

These figures indicate that females in the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union outnumbered males by approximately five to one. The ratio in the more militant Jute and Flax Workers' Union, rose from roughly two to one, to four to



one by 1910 (retaining this ratio up to and beyond the First World War). Given the sheer numbers of females in the industry it is only to be expected that more women than men would organise. However, by this time, women only outnumbered men in the industry by approximately two to one. So it can be said with some certainty that women in Dundee's mills and factories formed a far greater proportion than men of the textile unions' membership in their formative years, despite knowing presumably that the union had still to be formally recognised by textile employers. Out of over 40,000 jute workers after the damaging 1911 textiles strike, 10,000 to 12,000 were union members, the numbers being divided equally between Williamson's operatives' union and the Jute & Flax Workers' Union. According to the Census of 1911, there were 37,249 textile workers in Dundee. As a rule of thumb (using Williamson's ratio of 10%-12% male membership in 1889), it can be estimated that around 10,000 women belonged to a textiles trade union or roughly 25%. Pugh states (1992, p26) that union membership among women stood at 358,000 compared to 3.8 million men, or about 9% at this time, while Humm (1992, p55) says the figure of 25% membership was not achieved nationally across the UK until 1971.

By this time, therefore, trade union membership was a relatively healthy 35% of the total, a considerable advance from the Rev Williamson's pessimism a quarter of a century earlier. In fact, the JFWU was keen to make sure Williamson was given no credit for the final settlement of the 1911/12 strike. Sime wrote to the city's Labour MP that the MFOU union "is finished now and we are doing our best to bury it" (Dundee Trades Council, 1982). He also believed his efforts for the working people of Dundee far outstripped those of the other leaders to claim their allegiance at the time: "This union has, during the last 18 months, done more for the jute workers of Dundee than Mr Scrymgeour has during his lifetime" (*The Guide*, December 1918).

From the outset until well into the 20th century John Sime was president and Nicholas Marra secretary of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union. But Miss Jean-

nie Spence was vice-president and Jeannie Cameron treasurer. Spence, MBE, spent 65 of her 79 years as a Dundee weaver starting work as a half-timer in Dens Works at 10, retiring in 1954 from Caldrum Works of Jute Industries Ltd. (DC Obit. 6.12.1957). Normally, at least half of the union's committee were women (JFWU minutes, 1906-14). Its approach to women's issues is less certain to determine. Its apparent ambivalence towards the campaign to win votes for women is noted in the preceding chapter, while a letter from secretary Nicolas Marra to Miss Hedges of the Women's Trade Union League in November 1907 regretted that the union "had only managed to sell one gross of *Women Worker* for November, which leaves me with one gross on hand." The order fell to one half gross by the following January (Minutes, Nov 1907-Jan 1908).

This union, however, was more geared up to exacting concessions from Dundee's mill and factory owners over a host of grievances, mostly concerning wages and conditions. The withdrawal of Williamson's organisation from a dispute in 1916 saw the Jute & Flax Workers' Union emerge as the dominant workers' organisation in the city. By the First World War it had 20,000 members out of a total labour force of 47,000. The devastating Dundee-wide strike and lockout in 1923, the longest in the jute industry's history, brought a watershed in union representation as the JFWU apparently lost its considerable influence. By the start of the First World War, membership had fallen to just 3,700. <sup>1</sup>.

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**1. The more modern title of the Union of Jute, Flax and Kindred Textile Operatives was adopted in 1960, and eventually the union amalgamated into the Transport and General Workers' Union as Branch 7/403 - Jute and Flax Workers.**

### **Other textile trade unions**

Henry Williamson's Mill and Factory Operatives' union was the first proper textiles union in Dundee, arguably the first women's trade union in Scotland, and may have inspired other groups to organise. A small branch of the Scottish Mill and Factory Workers' Association was established in Dundee in 1894, but ceased to exist in 1899. The Dundee and District Calender Workers' Protective Association (later Union), was formed in 1887. It started with 200 male members and this number rose quickly to around 600. By 1910 it had 40 females and 440 males. The Union of Bobbin and Shuttle Operatives and the Powerloom Tenters Society were other small societies. The Scottish Bleachfield Workers Union was formed in November 1888 and consisted generally of unskilled workers from rural areas outwith Dundee. However, the union was formed after a mass meeting in Dundee and the membership in 1888 stood at 600. Contributions that year were listed at 2½d for males and one penny a week for females or boys earning less than 12 shillings per week (*Dundee Year-book*, 1888, p98), suggesting a mostly male membership.

### **Other trade unions in Dundee**

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, by the turn of the century, trade union representation reached 39.4% among metal workers in the city, 30.3% in the building trades, and 20.6% in textiles (Census, 1901). To put into context the scale of women's participation in the textile trade unions, it can be noted that Victorian trade unions in Dundee around the turn of the century included:

The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (local branch formed 1851, 600 men).

The Associated Shipwrights Society (formed 1869, 286 men in Dundee branch in 1889).

Associated Carpenters and Joiners (Dundee branch formed 1851, 100 men).

United Operative Plumbers' Association (local branch formed 1857, membership 80).

The Dundee Union of Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers (formed 1871, 200 members).

The Bakers' Federal Union (formed 1857, 300 members).

The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (local branch 1883) (145 members).

The Amalgamated Society of Tailors (formed 1877, 260 members).

The Scottish Typographical Association (formed 1858, 170 members).

The Dundee Bookbinders and Paper-Rulers Society (formed 1872, 15 members).

The Scottish Horsemen's Union (started in Dundee, 1888, 100 local membership).

(Sources: Dundee Yearbook 1889, Trade Union Development in Dundee, TUC Supplement, Dundee Courier, September 3, 1889)

### **Economic independence?**

*Industrial Organisation and Representation* has looked at levels of political activity in the Dundee workplace, which meant, of course, analysing the city's predominant industry - jute. Today, the Dundee female jute worker is usually remembered as the major anarchic figure in the city's respectable history. The bare-foot, shawl-clad, aproned millgirl was one of the dominant features of working life in Dundee. For almost the entire period examined by this thesis, she worked from 6 am to 6 pm. She worked as a preparatory shifter or rover in a low mill, or a spinner, and her workplace position is not to be confused with the better-paid, higher class factory weaver. At the turn of the century, 23% of total operatives were engaged in preparing, 28% in spinning and 32% in weaving (1901 Census). Recordings made for the Dundee Oral History Project, involving women who worked in the jute industry, indicate that transfer between mill and factory was practically unknown (DORC 1990, Dundee Local Studies Library).

There is no shortage of evidence to suggest that not only was the Dundee mill-girl capable of spontaneous industrial action, but of accompanying it with rowdy behaviour. It is even fair to say that the women and girls in Dundee's mills formed a volatile element within the city. They had their own rules, even,

it is said, their own unintelligible shopfloor patois and manner of communicating over the clacking of mill machinery. “Unruly, raucous and madcap, the millgirls were the despair of reformers and an embarrassment to employers and workers alike” (Walker, 1979, p45). “Below the surf of industrious, respectable factory workers ebb and surge the flotsom and jetsom of the stream - the millworkers” (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1893, p176). 1.

Even the otherwise stoical leader of the “women’s union,” the Rev Henry Williamson, occasionally despaired of their behaviour. “As a rule they go on working for months in the most docile manner, and then, all at once, without notice, 50 or 100 of them are in a state of rebellion” (RC 1890, p135). He frequently used this notion of a combustible female workforce to justify his own leadership of the Mill and Factory Operatives’ Union. While the likes of the Trades Council was prone to criticising his position because he did not actually work in the industry, Williamson’s view was that he was in a position to be a trusted advisor when “neither master, manager, nor any other official can get anything from them” (RC 1890, p135).

There are obvious reasons why various commentators have arrived at this characterisation of the city’s women. Dundee Social Union, among others, provided compelling evidence of low wages and poor housing affecting many in the city. In 1901 the *Dundee Yearbook* pointed out that few of the poorest paid operatives had overcoats and “above all, the wives cannot, through poverty, attend to their household or maternal duties as they ought to, with the deplorable results known to most of us.”

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1. *The Wasp - The Dundee Flagellator*, a short-lived satirical monthly, described a “typical” Saturday evening scene: ‘At the corner o’ Tay Street anither fecht is on, atween twa women, wha are separated by the men in blue - separated, bitten an’ torn, claes an’ skin, till e’en their best frien’s wad hardly ken them” (Jan, 1898).

The Yearbook article continued:

“A few shillings a week up or down when the wage is under 25s makes an immense difference to the condition of the workman, far more than the granting or withholding of half a sovereign to a person making over £2 a week. The shilling or two decides whether a single-roomed house can be rented or a double-roomed one, and further it means a reasonable diet for the family or a meagre and insufficient one. Briefly, the poor paid, unskilled and unorganised worker in a large city has a constant struggle for bare existence.”  
(*Dundee Yearbook*, 1901, p202)

Chapter Four, however, indicated that the thousands of women who passed through Dundee’s mill and factory gates from 1870 until the rundown of the jute industry were largely unrepresented by other women and, at best, belonged to a union where male leaders predominated, the Rev Henry Williamson for 32 years as leader of the Mill and Factory Operatives, and John Sime and Nicholas Marra as the enduringly powerful and largely permanent leaders of the Jute and Flax Workers’ Union. We might conclude that the circumstances of the dire trade battle with India, the highs and lows of production, and the times of full wages and idleness, conspired to make organisation difficult, not least because unions were controlled by men and women’s needs and concerns may not have been afforded high priority. Olive Banks noted (1992, p32), that “Labour leaders (also) tried to argue that feminism and the labour movement were incompatible. They were totally opposed to the idea of women organising on the basis of gender and tried to argue that class was more important than gender at least for working-class women.” Historically, Knox (1992, pp225-227) has also argued that the working class passed through a transitional period in the last decades of the 19th century which made organisation problematic, while Pugh (1993, p25) has noted antagonism from other (male) unions. That Dundee women managed to organise at all, and in sizeable numbers, albeit with the guidance of Williamson and Sime, is an achievement which should not be understated.

Yet, contrary to much of what has been written about women jute workers in Dundee, it can be concluded from contemporary evidence that many of them were in a position of some independence whereby they (would have) had the opportunity of taking part in formal political or trade union activity, or certainly not be denied the opportunity of participation. Contemporary statistics indicate that thousands of Dundee mill and factory women may in fact not have faced the domestic expenditure expected of them, insofar as they did not exist in a family situation and were thus free from domestic commitments and from parental control.

While much is now said of the poverty and “suffering” endured by the mill and factory women in Dundee (see, for example, Lenman, 1969, p20, Walker, 1979, pp 92 & 93) it is perhaps the case that wages in the textile industry were often little worse than other female occupations in Dundee and often better, depending, of course, on the ups and downs of trade.

At a time when “the low level of subsistence was just under 10 shillings, (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1893, p175) weavers (virtually all women according to Royal Commission evidence, (p127) and who formed almost one third of all female textile workers) were paid up to £1 a week, while, in his report to the Royal Commission (1890, p127) Mr J.H. Walker of the Dundee Chamber of Commerce told MPs that although spinners (despite the long apprenticeship required) were paid less and looked upon as less skilled, that “the average (wage) over a whole factory for four weeks is 16s 9d per week” (ibid). Fifteen years later, noted Pugh (1992, p27), during the First World War, the nationally agreed wage for women munitions workers was only £1 weekly.

In February 1907 the *Dundee Advertiser* put the women’s jute wages at two shillings a week below the national average for women, without referring to the special circumstances facing Dundee’s female workforce, such as the numbers of single women and girls earning these wages, the numbers of married

women in work, and the numbers who were economically independent. Lennox (p176), two years earlier, had put the wages of “ordinary” mill workers at between 10s 6d to 12s 6d per week, and 13s to 15s for factory workers (weavers). In Dundee in 1893 shop girls’ salaries began at 10 to 12 shillings and rose to around 17 shillings. Girl dye workers were taken on when they left school and received a wage of 5 shillings, which rose to “as much as 17s and 18s weekly.” Wages for confectionery workers began at 5 shillings and rose to an average around 10 to 12 shillings. Laundry workers were piece workers and they could earn from 18s to 20s a week. An apprentice tailoress received 2s 6d to begin with, rising by increments to 18s. Typists rose from 15 shillings to 20 shillings and “lady clerks” from 5 shillings to about 18 shillings (*Women’s Wages*, Dundee Yearbook, 1893, pp170-177). “Her work is not lightened when she realises she is doing a man’s work for a woman’s pay, which means about one half less” (ibid). The average wage “for a good worker” in the jute trade in 1893 was, according to the female investigator for the *Dundee Yearbook* that year, 15 shillings, which goes far to confirming Walker’s evidence to the 1890 Royal Commission. 1.

So, not only were textile wages no worse than elsewhere in some cases, the brilliant welfare pioneer Mary Lily Walker noted in 1912, “The jute industry relies mainly on the labour of women, girls and lads. For the latter it is more or less a blind alley occupation, but for women and girls it offers steady employment, and in many departments good wages” (*Work Among Women*, 1912, p70).

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1. She contributed the general observation: “It is a curious fact that the great mass of working women outside the professional classes have to rest content with £52 yearly as their maximum salary. When that point is reached employers seem to think a woman is receiving highest market value for her work” (Dundee Yearbook, 1893, p177).



Moreover, it is often stated that wages greatly fluctuated in the jute industry because of its fickle nature, ie, that workers would be sent home at times of overcapacity and dearth of orders. Giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour in December 1890, however, J.H. Walker of Dundee Chamber of Commerce said, "There is no irregularity in the jute trade. The workers are employed all the year round. The only short time we have had lately was in 1888, and then we had six months with Saturday off, but it was very common to have short time before 1861 when Dundee had the command of the jute trade" (1890, p127). <sup>1</sup>.

If some Dundee women were free from domestic commitments and economically independent, it is possibly because the tradition that the idea of an automatic escape from work through marriage was largely irrelevant in Dundee's case, where there existed in any case a large reservoir of single women. In 1911, when the proportion between the sexes in Dundee between the ages of 20 and 40 was 30,240 women to 21,823 men (Census Vol 1 p88), Mary Lily Walker of Dundee Social Union found 15,000 women of that age unmarried. "Contrary to general belief," she wrote, "early marriages are not very numerous" (1912, p69). "Early marriage," said Lennox (1905 p133) "is now not so common in Dundee and it is not on the increase." "Matrimony (in Dundee) has ceased to be the 'be-all-and-end-all' of a woman's life and occupations are chosen not merely *pour passer le temps*, but as a means of independence" (idem, p180). And it is clear from the Rev Henry Williamson's evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour in 1890 that the proportion of women in his union who were married was small. "I do not think many members of the Union are married" (1890, p134). Lennox (1905, p120) confirms that the number of single girls in Dundee was high by saying that only one in five of the 22,000 females between 14 and 45 years engaged in textile operations "are married women

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1. Dundee jute operatives at this time worked on Saturday from 6am to 9am, and from 10am to 1pm.

living with their husbands.” In 1911, when married women in work were first listed in occupational detail by the National Census, there were 5,639 married women occupied in textiles in Dundee, suggesting that over 20,000 others involved in textiles were unmarried and therefore likely to be economically more independent, whether because they were still single and living at home or living away from home with sisters or friends, or on their own.

Because so many single women lived outwith the family home in Dundee, it can be contentiously and controversially argued that many of these women enjoyed far greater purchasing power than has been imagined to date, and that they were free to exert a powerful influence on the general prosperity of the town and, to some extent, its political direction. The *Dundee Yearbook* (1888) claimed it was “not uncommon” for Dundee girls to desert the family home, or for women to share housing costs with other women. Mary Lily Walker noted in 1912: “It is a frequent complaint that young girls leave home when they begin to earn good money, simply from the love of independence.” Although she was of the view that this breaking of family ties was callous - that she thought it a positive move in many cases is equally clear: “She leaves her home, sometimes taking some of her brothers and sisters with her, sometimes setting up joint housekeeping with a companion of her own age and sex. The home she makes is bright with gay floorcloth and polished brass. The windows are draped with muslin, the bed with chintz. These are not the girls who marry casual labourers or mill workers and work after marriage. They are interested in the questions of the day, they attend lectures and classes, take an active part in Church life, are members of various unions and societies and are ready to help others” (*Work Among Women*, 1912, p74). The 1893 *Dundee Yearbook* added (p176) “The cry of freedom and independence which is everywhere prevalent is loudly echoed by them, and very many of the girls leave such homes and parents as they have as soon almost as they can work for themselves.” Miss Walker also noted: “When two working women live together their circumstances are comfortable. Some of the most attractive little homes in

Dundee are those of women and girls living as companions. The friendship begins in their youth, often persists till old age, and is only broken by death” (1912, p73).

Dr David Lennox found that, “in a town like Dundee where so many women are welcome wage earners, and so many men can find only intermittent employment, a large proportion of the women are independent of marriage as a means of livelihood” (Lennox, c1903, p132). Mona Wilson and Mary Lily Walker for Dundee Social Union gave compelling examples of the economic independence this could bring in 1905:

“Miss X and her friend are weavers, earning 14s a week. Last year they could make 16s or 17s. These two girls have a very neat and pretty room for which they pay 2s. They take coffee before starting for work, come back at 9 o'clock to breakfast, which consists of coffee, rolls, eggs and butter; and go to a dining room at 2pm. They have meat and potatoes, rice or stewed fruit, every day, for which they pay 4d or 4½d. At six they have tea with jam or cheese, and sometimes porridge and milk before going to bed. On Saturdays they have 2d pies for lunch and fish for tea. They spend about 10d a day each on food.”

“Miss Z and her sister live together. They are spinners earning 10s 6d and 11s 6d respectively. They have tea, bread, jam and sometimes fish for tea. For 1s a week each a neighbour provides their dinner, which consists generally of broth, sometimes potatoes and vegetables and suet pudding. They buy 1s of meat for Sunday and have 6d of fish in the week. Funeral Societies 8d. The food costs 7¾d per head per day.”

Source: Dundee Social Union, 1905 Report, p41.

Thirdly, it might also be added that economic freedom, if not flexibility, must have been the happy position of those women who were married and also in work, with husbands also in employment. It is the case that thousands of women who were married and in employment in textiles in Dundee were not the sole breadwinners at home, as often inferred in comments about Dundee's unique swapping of economic roles and her “kettle boiling” men (see Chapter

One). The notion that women were kept on after marriage because they were cheaper to employ is open to question. Although the figures provided by Mary Lily Walker and her team of social inquiry inspectors, and confirmed by Dr David Lennox's monograph of 1905, show that some men were prepared to work for less wages than women - eg low mill preparers - married women in particular were apparently kept on because they were the most efficient at the work they did. The Royal Commission in 1890 heard that, "The married women are the best and steadiest workers, and they have a very good influence over the rest of the people" (1890, p129), a conclusion powerfully emphasised by the Dundee-produced pro-natalist women's magazines *People's Friend* and *My Weekly*. "In many works she is preferred for her experience and steadiness," said Dundee Social Union in 1905 (p xii).

Yet motherhood was another "natural" destiny which working women in Dundee avoided to an extent. Lennox pointed out (1905 p134), "In these days, the burden of motherhood is often to be avoided for financial, social and personal reasons." He concluded (1905, p171) that "on average 3,000 child bearing women in Dundee tax their energies in the toil of mill and factory life to the detriment of their maternal duties."

It is difficult, of course, to say for certain how great a percentage of Dundee women found textile wages tolerable because of their unusual domestic circumstances and many clearly struggled against a regime of low wages and long hours. In spite of the oft-stated poverty, however, evidence of considerable savings power suggests a female community capable of financial prudence. In 1893 the percentage of bank depositors to population was: Aberdeen (15%), Edinburgh (20%), Glasgow (22%) and Dundee (22%). In 1901 there were 44,065 ordinary accounts in Dundee, equal to 30% of the population. According to Lennox (p264-5), who provided the figures above, "Only in Denmark with all its banks was the amount due to depositors per head of the estimated population greater than in Dundee." He cited the UK average deposit as being

£4.12s 7d, while in Dundee it was £12. 3s 11d.

Whereas a simple explanation for this might be found in the fortunes of the city's jute barons, the figures provided by Lennox makes this highly improbable. In 1901, he says, 52.8% of the ordinary depositors had balances which did not exceed £10 - a figure equivalent to 10 weeks' wages today. In the banking period ending 1904, 33.4% of new depositors were people engaged in spinning, weaving, dyeing and engineering (p266). Allowing for duplicate policies, the number of persons in the city insured that year was not less than 105,000, that is, 64% of the entire population, with an average yearly premium of ten shillings (the equivalent of just under a week's wage). Knox (1992, p22) notes: "The mid-Victorian decades witnessed the growth of saving bank and co-operative societies as institutions of working class self-help."

When a Government tank visited Dundee in 1918 to help raise funds for the war effort, the jute manufacturers in the city pledged a total of £1,700. There was great excitement and no shortage of humour throughout the city when this amount was eclipsed by the £2,000 donation by Williamson's shrinking Mill and Factory Operatives' Union (Dundee Trades Council, 1982). Money from millworkers and factory operatives was regularly the biggest (by far) donation to Dundee Royal Infirmary, the city's voluntary hospital, over the course of the period studied (DRI annual reports, 1916-1920) - although this may be partly accountable by managers' fines on the women!

## **Conclusion**

Levels of political activity in the Dundee workplace have been examined using, among many sources, the available records of the Dundee & District Factory Operatives' Union, which, when created in 1885 was Scotland's first women-only union, and the minute books and committee records of the more formidable and sizeable Dundee and District Jute and Flax Workers' Union. Questions

addressed included: why did the textile unions in Dundee take so long to gain a foothold in an industry established some 50 years, and was its predominantly female base a factor? Why did the eventual presence of powerful jute unions not attract greater numbers of (female) members? How important was gender itself in determining whether women organised earlier, later, or in a different way from other industrial centres?

Chapter Four argued that Dundee's massive female workforce in its dominant industry was relatively slow to respond to the development of trade unions and their political affiliates, but eventually participated in union affairs to a significant degree. More generally, the absence of a powerful women-led trade organisation may have inhibited any positive moves towards political representation, or, indeed, the formation of an independent, female political party. Almost in a *Catch 22* situation, in which many of Dundee's working women did not have the parliamentary vote, William Knox has pointed out (1992, 234), "Exclusion from the system of parliamentary politics made it difficult to conceptualise independent working class representation."

Chapter Four also acknowledged that the city's manufacturers were probably better content to deal man to man with union leaders like Henry Williamson and John Sime, and less so with a woman from the shopfloor. But the evidence shows that fewer barriers to trade union activity confronted the city's women than might have been previously thought. It should also be noted that there is scant evidence of a crossover between millworkers and political organisations elsewhere. Neither was there evidence of links to middle-class groups, although feminist goals, such as equal pay, were shared. It was not the case, however, that the heyday of Dundee's staple industry led to the emergence of an indigenous women's movement or any charismatic, powerful female leaders and this may have been because, as Banks noted (1993, p43), women trade union members suffered because "like labour women generally they owed loyalty to a wider movement that did not share many of their goals." Nonetheless,

the chapter showed that it was in the textiles workplace that women turned their thoughts to organisation.

A further area explored in Chapter Four was the ideological gulf between the Factory Operatives' Union, founded with the aim to avoid strikes almost at any cost .... "an organisation which shall be a power for the prevention of strikes and lockouts" ... and the Jute and Flax Workers' Union, effectively a breakaway union from the other, which stated in the introduction to its constitution, "while we deplore strikes...we must be prepared for such a contingency." It was found that both positions were driven by male union leaders, and that the women in Dundee's textile unions were never an autonomous group. Although numerically superior, they formed a group dominated by men. Thus, it is entirely possible that women's needs were not paramount in the activities of these "women" unions.

However, an interesting area of inquiry in Chapter Four examined levels of working women's economic independence. This was important because, as James has noted (1993, p53), if a woman is economically dependant "her political life may be subject to his goodwill." Rather, the data presented showed a certain level of economic independence among some women which completely diversified from known histories of textile women and the preponderance of claims that they were economically destitute. This raises the possibility that, for these women at least, there were fewer barriers to political participation.

Chapter Five now turns to examining evidence to determine whether the city's first elected bodies created barriers to participation, or encouraged equality of representation - and whether women members made a difference to influential school boards and parish councils when the opportunity arose to join them.

# Chapter Five

## Elected bodies and representation

### Introduction

Elected bodies are worthy of study in relation to the overall objectives of this work in that they provide an indication of the breadth of the women's movement generally in Dundee. Indeed, in the overall political picture within the city, it is important to determine whether they intervened in any significant way as they provided the first opportunities for women to fill elected posts on powerful organisations with civic responsibilities. In looking for political activity in Dundee generally, two influential elected bodies are particularly important in terms of women's access, Dundee School Board and Dundee Parish Council.

In 1872, the State openly acknowledged its direct responsibility for educating the people of Scotland and an Act of Parliament that year established a system of local administration through elected School Boards (Scotland, 1970, Vol II, pp 5-7). That legislation made education in Scotland compulsory from the ages of five to 13. An Act of 1883 raised the leaving age to 14, but allowed "half-time" working after the age of 10, an element acted upon with enterprise by working mothers and manufacturers in Dundee's dominant textiles industry. Acts of 1889 and 1890 made funds available for the new School Boards to abolish fees in primary schools, but secondary education was not legally free until the Act of 1945 (ibid, p6). 1

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1. Gender differences often prevailed for pupils. From the mid-19th century boys and girls often had different entrances to shared buildings, and there were specific differences in timetables and teaching staff. George Watson's Ladies' College in Edinburgh in 1920, for example, was intended "to prepare girls for a cultured home life," while the corresponding boys' school aimed "to train strong men, capable of filling a place in the world" (Scotland, 1970, p10).



Parish Councils were also elected and they were also powerful. From 1870 they provided the first formal fora for women's participation and became organisations which were a barometer of women's issues and concerns as well as testbeds of their willingness to stand for election. Dundee Parish Council was no exception.

### **Dundee School Board**

One thousand School Boards were established for all children in Scotland's then 987 parishes following the 1872 Act. They were to consist of between five and 15 members. They were constituted after election in which owner and occupiers could participate. Women, then, were disadvantaged to a considerable extent and James Scotland (1970, p13) makes the point that members were "usually from the professional and well-to-do" classes. The boards had considerable powers, but their key responsibilities in the first few years after their creation appears to have been building schools and initiating programmes to improve school attendance. 1.

Dundee School Board in its formative years not only comprised "local professional and well-to-do classes" but reflected local politics. Liberal supporters were prominent and dominant and they were entirely male. And at this time the boards were still heavily politicised. In 1909, for example, Mr Coultard's election in sixth place in the poll resulted in great rejoicing by a large company of Prohibitionists in Albert Square. "His supporters took a stand on the base of the Queen's statue and at half past three in the morning engaged in singing a psalm" (DC 9.4.1909).

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1. In 1872 total school provision in Dundee was 17,733 places and Dundee School Board immediately built four new schools to increase this by a further 2,000 places. (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1873) In 1875 the city had 11 day schools in operation with an average attendance of 3,500 children. At the time 4,000 children attended half-time schools. In 1881 the Board had 15 schools with an average attendance of 6,642. By 1901 there were 23 board schools (Lennox, 1905, p268).

Dundee School Board was responsible for the vast majority of the schools in Dundee, although these did not include the independent High School, nor a handful of denominational establishments and one or two private schools. The board comprised 15 men, the majority of them in the early years local clergymen, as well as the Liberal provost and one or two Liberal town councillors (DSB Minutes, 1873-91). The appointment of a woman to the headship of one of the Dundee School Board schools as early as 1878 was described as a “notable event” (Committee of Council of Education minutes 1878-1979, p150).

From its creation in 1873 until 1891 there were no female members of Dundee School Board and none in Dundee Educational Trust which acted as a watchdog and to raise funds for the board (DSB Minutes Vols 1-18, 1873-91). Indeed, prior to 1892, there are no mentions in the board minutes of women wishing to stand for election. That year, however, retired teacher Jessie Gordon Shaw was elected to Dundee School Board, joining in 1892, six clergymen including the Rev Henry Williamson of the Mill and Factory Operatives’ Union, one coal merchant, one manufacturer, one printer, one mathematics professor, three retired teachers and a merchant. Bearing in mind that the boards consistently comprised 15 members, the table below shows the level of women’s representation - following Miss Shaw’s solo period of office as the only woman - through the remainder of the 1890s and to the end of the First World War:

**Table One: Dundee School Board women members, 1892-1918.**

**1892 - 1900** - Miss Jessie Gordon Shaw

**1901 - 1906** - Miss Shaw and Mrs Isobel Carlaw Martin

**1907 - 1909** - Miss Shaw, Mrs Carlaw Martin and Miss Agnes Husband

**1910 - 1911** - Miss Husband and Margaret Mary Ann Steel

**1912 - 1914** - Miss Husband

**1915 - 1918** - Miss Husband and Minnie Kynoch

(Source: Dundee School Board Minutes & *Dundee Town Council Diary*, 1892-1918)

Thus, over its first half century of existence, membership of the powerful Dundee School Board included only five women from over 300 available positions. But while Edinburgh School Board had a female member as early as its first board in 1872 (Innes, 1998, p178) Dundee's record appears comparable to other major cities in Scotland. Of Glasgow's 15 elected board members in 1909, three were women, and, in Edinburgh, four of the 29 board members were female (*Scotsman*, 2.4.1909).

In 1895 Jessie Gordon Shaw was made convener of the Board's cookery sub-committee. She was also a member of the clothing, evening school and caretakers' committees (DSB Minutes, 2.5.1895). From 1906 Isobel Carlaw Martin was convener of domestic economy. At best, however, (and for one electoral period only) there were four women simultaneously on the board, or just over 25% of its membership total. At worse there were periods in the 20th century when there was just one woman representative on the 15-strong board.

The Act of 1918 ended the existence of Scotland's 900 parish-based school boards. In 1919, 38 county-based education authorities took over (Scottish Education Reports, 1919-1920). The Dundee Education Authority minutes make it evident that the new education authority "adopted standing orders of School Boards." Dundee Education Authority was elected to run Dundee's 27 municipal schools and two special schools in 1919. It had 22 members, elections taking place in four divisions, comprising the city's 11 electoral wards.

**Table Two: Dundee Education Authority women members, 1919-1930**

**1919 - 1923** - Miss Agnes Husband and Mrs Euphemia Abernethy

**1924 - 1925** - Miss Husband, Mrs Abernethy and Mrs David Johnston

**1926 - 1928** - Miss Husband, Mrs Abernethy, Mrs Alicia Kennedy  
and Mrs Agnes Shand

**1929 - 1930** - Mrs Abernethy, Mrs Kennedy, Mrs Shand, Mrs Elizabeth Bell

Source: Dundee Education Authority minutes, 1919-1939

The first years of Dundee Education Authority comprised 20 men and two women, Mrs Euphemia Abernethy and Miss Agnes Husband, who had carried over from the last School Board. Although the authority's role involved sub-committees dealing with various activities, such as works, schools, supplies, medicine, finance, checking, and so on, only in the case of the domestic economy committee was a woman, Miss Husband, given the chair (Minutes, 18.9.1919). On occasion, however, Husband and Abernethy worked together. In April 1920 for example they proposed and seconded a motion to increase the wages of first lady assistant teachers. This was rejected by the committee (Minutes, 20.4.1920). Both women were returned unopposed without election in 1921. Elsewhere, in the remaining three divisions, four women stood for election for 15 available places, but failed to record sufficient votes. Thus the make-up of the second Dundee Education Authority, that of 1921, consisted again of 20 men and two women, Husband and Abernethy. Gradually elective matters improved and, as Table Two shows, new female faces were introduced to the committee as the 1920s progressed. Indeed, the numbers of women on the authority gradually increased, from the original two, to double that number for most of the 1920s. This represents over 18% of the total membership, when the Scottish total (as quoted by Innes (1998, p179) was 82 women members out of approximately 1000 on local education authorities, otherwise 8.2%. As with School Boards, the women represented on Dundee Education Authority did not apparently lag behind other cities.

In 1930, the role and responsibilities of the Education Authority were absorbed into Dundee Town Council. A standing committee for Education was established, to be known as Dundee Education Committee, and drawing members from three sources, town councillors; persons with experience in education; and persons nominated from Roman Catholic and Episcopalian school authorities (*Dundee Directory*, 1930). In 1930, the provision for persons with experience in education included "two women representatives" - Elizabeth Bell and Agnes Shand. Rather unwittingly perhaps, they were among the first

women in Dundee empowered with Dundee Town Council committee status.

It can be concluded that women played an insignificant role in the powerful Dundee School Board for almost its entire duration, and at a time when the education of so-called half-timers in Dundee was very much a controversial issue. The employment of school children clearly had advantages in respect of employers and in the case of many families desperate for additional income, but welfare reformers had long campaigned for its abolition. But Walker (1979, p83) claimed that in the early years of the 20th century Dundee School Board “granted more school exemptions for purposes of child labour than did Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Paisley combined.” In 1900, for instance, there were 2,135 children working in the city as half-timers, and 2,800 children between 12 and 14 years of age who were exempted from school by the board (DSB Annual Report, 1900). In this year, as we have seen above, female representation, who might have argued hard against such employment, was limited to just one member.

The School Board and Education Authority minutes also indicate that half-time education was more a formality than a matter given careful consideration on a weekly basis. There is no instance where women members commented strongly upon the subject. Rather, it is more noticeable that the women were concerned with wider social and adult educational issues. Indeed, if a breakthrough by women into the vitally-important sphere of social education was expected in Dundee it failed to materialise. Outnumbered and often out-voted, it is the case that most of the debate recorded in the committee minutes predictably concerned members of the Board’s male majority.

### **Dundee Parish Council**

In the politics of Dundee Parochial Board, later Dundee Combined Parish Council, Liberals were similarly prominent in the period from 1870 to 1900.

From 1870, the council had an office in Euclid Street near the High School, but soon moved to offices in the City Chambers, which placed it at the heart of municipal life. The Parochial Board dealt with matters concerning the two poorhouses in Dundee, disputes over settlements, financial matters concerning individuals, the law regarding poverty, and so on. By the turn of the century, for example, its Relief sub-committee was attracting an average of 100 applications for help every week, an indication of widespread hardship in the textiles-dominated city (Annual Report, 1905).<sup>1</sup> It was also common for the council to deal with wife desertions, noted in the minutes as roughly a dozen a year, which often resulted in a prison sentence or heavy fine for the offender, and an extra burden on the poor house. Thus many issues of relevance to women, and women's activities, fell under the important remit of the council.

In the 1870s Dundee Parish Council had a membership of (mostly) 24 individuals, but, in 1880, the board was combined with Liff Parochial Board (on the outskirts of Dundee) to become Dundee Combined Parochial Board with a membership of 40 (DCPB Minutes, 1870-1880). At this time its members were elected by Dundee magistrates or nominated by the Kirk sessions of Dundee and Liff (Town Council Diary, 1895). Under the Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1894, however, the council became known as Dundee Combined Parish Council, with 31 elected members, three from each of Dundee's nine electoral wards and two each from the Liff and Broughty Ferry suburbs. Initially, the Parochial Board included well-known Liberal Party provosts and bailies, clergymen and manufacturers.

Elections for Dundee Combined Parish Council were held in November and those elected remained in post for three years. Meetings of the full council took

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1. An untypical case was No. 871c in 1901: "Applicant is aged 42 years and is at present on Outdoor Roll (ie not resident in poorhouse) in receipt of 6 shillings a week. She is a widow, and is employed in a laundry for three days a week, for which she receives 7s 6d. She has two children, aged 12 years and 9 years respectfully." After discussion the committee agreed by a majority to reduce the weekly allowance to 5 shillings a week (Minutes, November 1901).

place once a month, with some of the committees meeting weekly. There were four sub-committees; Relief, Law & Finance, Poorhouse and Accounts. The council dispensed large amounts of money on Dundee's two poorhouses, as well as on other areas such as clothing and shoes, vaccinations and books to "pauper children" (DPC Minutes 1896-1900). Its expenditure totalled around £50,000 annually in 1900 and, by 1922, around £130,000, drawing the comment from the *People's Journal* that, "It is the greatest of the city's spending boards" (PJ 14.10.1922).

Between 1870 and 1896, all were men, including, in 1896, the prohibitionist Edwin Scrymgeour. No woman was elected to Dundee Parochial Board or, afterwards, to Dundee Combined Parish Council until the turn of the century.

In November 1902, Agnes Husband and Mary Lily Walker became the first women to be elected to the Dundee Parish Council. After 1903, however, Miss Husband appears to have concentrated on her School Board duties (and perhaps the suffragette campaign) leaving Miss Walker of Dundee Social Union as the sole female representative on the Parish Council until 1908.

### **Table Three - Dundee Parish Council women members 1903 -1930**

<b>1903 - 1905</b>	- Miss Mary Lily Walker, Miss Agnes Husband
<b>1906 - 1908</b>	- Miss Mary Lily Walker.
<b>1909 - 1911</b>	- Miss Walker, Miss Elizabeth Scotland, Mrs Kate Lumsden, Dr Alice Moorhead. (Dr Moorhead soon resigned on marriage)
<b>1912 - 1914</b>	- Miss Walker, Miss Scotland, Mrs Lumsden, Miss Husband, Mrs Agnes Grant
<b>1915 - 1917</b>	- Miss Scotland, Mrs Lumsden, Miss Husband, Mrs Grant, Mrs Agnes Mitchell
<b>1918 - 1920</b>	- Miss Scotland, Mrs Lumsden, Miss Husband, Mrs Mitchell
<b>1920 - 1922</b>	- Miss Scotland, Miss Husband, Mrs Mitchell, Mrs Mary Allan Mrs M.E. Gordon and Mrs Annie Strachan
<b>1923 - 1925</b>	- Miss Scotland, Mrs Mitchell, Mrs Allan, Mrs Strachan, Mrs Robina Gow, Mrs Lily Miller and Mrs Elizabeth Binny
<b>1924 -1925</b>	- Miss Scotland, Mrs Allan, Mrs Strachan, Mrs Gow, Mrs Miller, Mrs Binny
<b>1926 - 1928</b>	- Miss Scotland, Mrs Strachan, Mrs Gow and Mrs Binny
<b>1929 - 1930</b>	- Miss Scotland, Mrs Gow, Mrs Strachan and Mrs Binny.

The Parish Council, like Dundee School Board, increased its female complement as the 20th century progressed and the political forum embraced welfare and workplace issues. Yet, at most, women formed less than 25% of the council's membership, the largest representation of women, seven in 1923, or 23%, being present in a full council numbering 31 members. That year there were 69 candidates for the 31 seats, 12 of them women, or 17%. However, women convened two of the council's four sub-committees. Mrs Annie Strachan was convener of Relief, Elizabeth Scotland convener of Education. Mary Allen was vice-convener of the Poorhouse sub-committee.

With mostly three representatives from Dundee's 11 municipal wards being elected every three years to serve on the council, women were never put forward in many more than half of the wards and were never in a majority of two in any individual ward. Moreover, the minutes indicate that no woman was ever put forward to chair the Parish Council. The committee minutes reveal Elizabeth Scotland, Kate Lumsden Dr Alice Moorhead and Miss Mary Lily Walker voting together several times during 1908, although losing the vote on most occasions. The four women voted again together in the Relief Committee in January 1908 over increasing payments to the poor, and again on February 8 (Minutes 14.1.1908 and 8.2.1908). But there were other occasions when they took opposite camps.

It would be erroneous to say, on the other hand, that Dundee lagged behind in terms of female Parish Council representation. In Scotland as a whole for 1927-28, for example, there were 184 women out of a total of 8,013 members serving on Parish Councils (Innes, 1998, p179), or just 2.4%. In the same year, women on Dundee Parish Council accounted for just under 13% of the membership. It would be fair to say that many issues of relevance to women, and women's activities, fell under the important remit of the Council, and that women acted with passionate and significant attitudes within it for two decades, providing useful if not dynamic evidence of progressive political activ-



ity. Towards the end of the 1920s much of the council's energies were taken up by the transfer of functions to the local authority. In 1930 it passed over a credit balance of £14,000 to Dundee Town Council (Minutes 1928-29, p108).

### **The women involved**

The first woman elected to Dundee Parish Council was the pioneer social worker Mary Lily Walker, the full-time housing superintendant of Dundee Social Union (see Chapter Four) and the architect behind the ground-breaking Social Union report into Dundee living conditions in 1905. She was joined on the council by Miss Agnes Husband, an Independent Labour Party activist, a local dressmaker who was also involved in the creation of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union in 1906. She served on Dundee School Board and was secretary of Dundee Freedom League during the suffrage campaign 1907-14. She was given the Freedom of the City in 1926. The third woman elected to Dundee Parish Council was Elizabeth Scotland, a well-known boot and shoe manufacturer in the West End of the city who wrote to the *Dundee Advertiser* on the suffrage issue. She also served as a Justice of the Peace. Agnes Grant, who joined the council in 1911, was a milliner. Turning to the membership of the Dundee Education Authority for 1929, Mrs Euphemia Abernethy and Mrs Alicia Kennedy were wives of prominent manufacturers, while Agnes Shand was the proprietrix of the West End Cinema in Perth Road.

### **Conclusion**

Though their role in public affairs has yet to be fully researched, Chapter Five showed that elected organisations, such as the influential School Board and a powerful Parish Council, had considerable input to life in Dundee. How these organisations dealt with gender equality and difference issues were examined and found to be less than satisfactory, however. The records of both indicated a dearth of women representatives until the turn of the century. Then, however, it was shown through the activities of these organisations that elected women

made a significant difference to political structures in Dundee - and political outcomes - as, gradually, their numbers and influence increased.

While it might be concluded that the 20th century make-up of Dundee Parish Council differed from that in the final years of the previous century, when Liberal Party officials formed the bulk of the membership, and it can be asserted from evidence that working women played a significant role in the 20th century affairs of Dundee School Board, Education Authority and Parish Council, we must distinguish them from the textiles working-class women who formed by far the largest occupational sector in the manufacturing city. However, given that it was not until 1867 that urban male working class was enfranchised, it would be wrong to expect large numbers of women in Dundee to put themselves forward to election in the 1870s. The coming of the textile trade unions and the spread of influential women's organisations contributed towards increased participation and representation in elected bodies in the early 20th century, as will be shown in the next chapter on autonomous women's organisations.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Autonomous organisations: Representation of Women's Interests**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter identifies women as a group with interests which span political activities and which blur the distinction between households, the workplace and the formal political arena in Dundee. The chapter identifies terrain which proved fertile for women's voices to be heard, and for their aspirations and objectives to be channelled and targeted. The women identified in this section were not anonymous at the time, but have largely been forgotten in published histories since. They organised into locally focused groups, such as Dundee Women Citizens' Association and Dundee Soroptomists, which entered the political environment in the city and eventually extended to impact on broader party political structures, in terms of actively promoting the interests and welfare of women.

Two principal, but contrasting groups are highlighted in particular - one consisting of a small group of welfare workers whose aim was to help the massive female workforce in Dundee between 1900 and the Second World War; the other a large autonomous group of politically motivated women which emerged from the post-suffrage period and which attempted to improve women's domestic, working and political access and impact generally. But other groups are mentioned, where gender was found to have significance and women played important participatory roles.

New empirical information, census data and historical material is used in this chapter to chart the progress of the groups as they entered a new century, passed through the vote, attained control of person and property, entered

“closed” professions, gained access to institutional concerns and moved closer to citizenship and full political rights. In particular, key themes are drawn from unrecorded primary sources.

## Background

Like many prosperous Victorian cities, Dundee had a plethora of voluntary and charitable institutions, organisations and good causes from the 1800s on in which feminist activism was located. The Dundee Female Society in 1871, for example, was to be found “visiting and relieving aged females in Distressing Circumstances” (*Dundee Directory*, 1871). This society was located in Lochee Road and we can surmise that impoverished working class women connected to the giant Cox jute works nearby may have been supported and sheltered by it. A Dundee branch of the Scottish Ladies’ Association for Female Education in India also appears that year, with a sizeable committee of 13 women. There was a Clothing Society and, as early as 1848, an institution called The Home, “for the Reformation of Females.” By the turn of the century a Dundee Women’s Temperance Union existed and three branches of the Dundee Young Women’s Christian Association, which provided classes in reading, cooking, sewing, ambulance and accommodation for occasional boarders.” Dundee Industrial Schools Society had a separate Ladies Committee with over 30 women members in 1890, while, the same year, Dundee Female Rescue Homes was “under management of a committee of ladies” (*Dundee Directory*).

Such organisations fostered the development of female and community consciousness at a time of rapid population expansion in Dundee. But until the textile unions came along in 1885 and 1906, the only major organisation to attract sizeable numbers of working class people was Dundee Burial Society. 1.

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1. This had been established in March 1862 for the purpose of enabling working people to provide for funeral costs through a small weekly payment. Membership in 1890 was 11,000 and by 1914, 16,000. Its trustees, office bearers and committee of management were all men in 1890 (*Dundee Directory*, 1890 & 1914). The Dundee Burial Society was formally wound up in 1998 after many years in abeyance.

Although, as Breitenbach and Gordon point out (1992,p7) it is a “truism that it is easier to uncover evidence about the powerful than the powerless, and by extension, the middle class rather than the working class,” there was an organisation, largely run by women, which set out purposefully to examine working class existence and behaviour in Dundee. This organisation was Dundee Social Union.

### **Dundee Social Union**

A largely-female organisation which has an honorable record of social service and pioneering political work in the city was Dundee Social Union. Access to this organisation’s committee minutes and its celebrated 1905 Report provide a valuable insight into its diverse range of activities and the avenues it pursued in relation to solving the city’s industrial woes, as well as the political thinking of the women behind its exploration of the city’s working classes. Dundee Social Union was formed in 1888 “to promote the well-being of the inhabitants of the town” (Valentine, 1920, p2). The organisation was largely non-political and was primarily concerned with housing, child welfare and recreation, but as will be shown hereafter, its activities transcended political as well as welfare boundaries.

Dundee Social Union was a voluntary organisation which was run by an executive committee, supported by some local medical practitioners. A list of office bearers in 1906 shows 28 executive committee members of whom 16 are women (Minutes 29.3.1906). Among those concerned with its work were Agnes Husband, a teacher who was one of the first women elected to the Dundee Parish Council and Dundee School Board (see Chapter Five). Another was Dr Emily Thomson, a pioneering woman doctor graduate from University College Dundee. Another was Mary Henderson, the daughter of an architect who became, in 1911, organiser for the Scottish Federation of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and later its parliamentary secretary. She was also honorary secretary of the Dundee Women’s Suffrage Society and, during the

war, the honorary secretary of the Dundee Women's War Relief Committee.

Dundee Social Union's full-time superintendent of housing, and effectively its central figure from its outset until 1913, was Mary Lily Walker, its salaried chief investigator. Members paid subscriptions, while other supporters could enrol as helpers for a smaller amount. The Union established committees for Housing, Aid to Invalid Children, the Brabazon Scheme (which existed to bring fresh interest into the lives of those in the Poor House), Social Economics, Restaurants for Mothers and Recreation & Business. Its activities covered a range of concerns. For example, from 1903 the Union ran "as an experiment" a restaurant for nursing mothers, which was supported by a donation of £100 a year (Minutes 29.3.1906). In 1906 a hall in Maxwelltown, Dundee, was rented to allow "Miss Walker to use it for a few hours daily for the purpose of supplying penny dinners to school children" (Minutes, 25.6.1906).

In the spring of 1905 Dundee Social Union issued an extensive and far-reaching report of investigations made by a team of women inspectors, led by Mary Lily Walker and supported by medical practitioners. The *Report on Housing and Industrial Conditions in Dundee* looked into the physical condition of housing, working conditions, wages, employment and children's welfare in Dundee. It excited widespread interest and was eventually used in evidence in a Royal Commission into housing and cited on the floor of the House of Commons.

Dundee Social Union's *Report of Housing and Housing Conditions, and Medical Inspection of School Children* was published by John Leng in Dundee in 1905. It was 150 pages in length and its two principal authors, Mary Lily Walker, the Union's honorary superintendent of housing, and Mona Wilson, the superintendent of the inquiry, were responsible for its first 100 pages. In completing the task of evaluating life in nearly 6,000 working-class houses in the heart of Dundee, the two women were aided by a team of four women

inspectors, and could call on the support of local medical practitioners. But “the direction of the whole inquiry was entrusted to the two women” (DSU, 1905, p vi).

In the early years of the decade the need for reliable data on working class conditions had become more fully recognised thanks to surveys carried out by Charles Booth in London and Joseph Rowntree in York. Booth and Rowntree’s gauge of the poverty line at between 18 shillings and 21 shillings in the last decade of the 19th century (Lenman, 1969, p65) would have immediately told the Social Union inspectors that virtually the entire Dundee working class could be considered impoverished, if based on accepted standards. Thus, in the summer of 1904 the Committee of Dundee Social Union agreed to investigate certain of the social conditions which prevailed in the city, especially those affecting the poorer classes. In the course of the Union’s report, 5,888 homes in two selected districts of the older centre of Dundee were evaluated. 1.

The issues dealt with by the Union are important to this study because of the need to highlight those factors which may have advanced or retarded political activity among Dundee’s working population of women. This is a key point in the light of the statements made in Chapter One concerning access to decision-making groups. It is also important to highlight a women-conscious group which was clearly driven by women. The topics they dealt with included:

***Housing:*** Information was obtained relating to the number of rooms in each house visited, number of occupants, the nature of the sanitary conditions and provision of water taps and washhouses. The city’s working classes lived in tenement blocks, with the blocks divided into houses containing one, two, three or more rooms. The report pinpointed Census data showing that 63.1% of Dundee’s population lived in one or two roomed houses. Moreover, of 18,252

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1. Ominously, the authors pointed out that “the reports do not deal with the remedies for the evils disclosed” (DSU 1905 p vi).

persons living in one-roomed houses, 62% were living more than two to a room. "The lady inspectors found beds in the kitchen of almost all the houses visited" (ibid p ix). Lower rooms were often sunless, staircases common to several families, and often appalling sanitary conditions prevailed. The women's survey revealed that Dundee was the worst of other Scottish cities for density of housing occupation.

**TABLE ONE:** percentage of families living in three rooms or under, 1905

Edinburgh	Glasgow	Aberdeen	Dundee
63.6	86.3	76.6	88.4

Source: Dundee Social Union, 1905

The inquiry was consequently able to demonstrate that overcrowding of a serious nature prevailed in working class districts of Dundee.

***Family Income and Expenditure:*** The inspectors noted the occupations of families in the 5,888 houses visited, the total numbers living and dead, and some details of wages. In 3,039 cases the earnings of all wage earners were stated. Their report showed that nearly half of the households investigated were dependent on one female wage earner, who, in 655 cases, earned less than 15 shillings a week, which suggests they were spinners or preparers in the low mill. In three cases only did the wage exceed £1 a week. The survey showed that "in a large number of cases the husband was unemployed" and therefore a dependent.

***Employment and Wages:***

The report found that in 1901 the average wage for women was below 12 shillings in eight textile processes, and under 18 shillings for the remaining five. Women were largely employed in the preparing processes which required little skill. Spinning was highly skilled and required long apprenticeship, but was still less well paid than weaving. But without women's labour, noted the



Inquiry, Dundee would sink to the level of a small burgh; as a manufacturing centre it would possibly cease to exist. "No other community, therefore, has a more vital interest in everything pertaining to the welfare of women" (DSU 1905 p xi).

***Infant Mortality:*** The report showed that Dundee in 1904 headed the list of 15 principal towns in Scotland with an infant mortality rate of 174 per 1,000 births. The inspectors showed that 240 mothers, who had been working in Dundee's mills and factories both before and after marriage, had given birth to 885 children, and no fewer than 520, or just under 60%, were dead. This presumably inspired the historian William Walker to make his controversial statements about infanticide in Dundee (see *Juteopolis*, 1979, pp107-110).

Overall, therefore, the report by Dundee Social Union painted a picture of overcrowding and insanitary conditions, poor wages and unique domestic factors specific to Dundee, all which may be taken into account when examining the role played by the city's working women in politics and to return to the key thesis question of why they are regarded, as three of Dundee's most eminent modern historians (Whately, Swinfen & Smith, 1993, p117) concluded, as "a defiant sisterhood."

Following its pioneering report, the women-driven Social Union considered buying up properties to rent back to the working class population. By degrees 10 properties in poor districts of the town were converted for their use, with the Union acting as factors. The Union executive went into great detail about the houses they bought. It was aware that older properties deteriorated, but relied on appeals for funds to provide a system whereby houses could be divided into single-room flats to provide homes for vulnerable mill women. 1.

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1. In this we see a parallel with the 1920s' pressure placed upon Dundee Town Council for one-room homes for single mill women by the local branch of the Women Citizen's Association, and by the Fleming Trust.

Besides improving the dwellings, however, the Union made a profit through the commission for factoring the properties, and importantly, kept in close contact with poorer women in Dundee's working class areas. By 1921, many of the factored properties had to be given up; repairs had become financially impossible (Minutes, 18.5.1921).

Dundee Social Union's work among the city's poor did not cease with its expansive study of 1905. In 1907 Miss Walker was asked to give evidence before a Poor Law Commission. That year the Union accepted an invitation by the Scottish Council for Women Trades to send two delegates to the Conference on Sweated Trades in Glasgow (Minutes, 27.6.1907). In 1909 the Union launched Savings Banks in two poorer areas of Dundee, Maxwelltown and West Park - and these were soon declared a success (Minutes 8.10.1909). In 1912 the Social Union combined with the National Union of Women Workers and the British Women's Temperance Society in organising a meeting of women to explain the National Health Insurance Act - as they considered it "a matter of importance to give information to the women of Dundee" (Minutes, 23.12.1912). Appeals went out for funds and, the following year, the Union was able to open a holiday home at Kingennie, on the coast near Dundee, and acquired a home for "cripple and invalid" children at Auchterhouse, to the north of the city.

The year 1913 also marked the passing of Mary Lily Walker, the remarkable leader of the Social Union, whose report of 1905 did much to raise awareness of conditions of life and work in Dundee. Walker had been a member of Dundee Parish Council, a member of the Advisory Committee of the National Health Insurance Commission for Scotland and Honorary Secretary for the Dundee Women's Hospital. The Committee recorded "warm appreciation of the great service which she rendered for many years to the cause of social improvement among the poor of Dundee" (Minutes, 11.7.1913). In a telling sentence, her obituary writer suggested that "much of her activity was in the

nature of pioneer work, the fruit of which must come later.”

Indeed, Mary Lily Walker’s spirit lived on. She directed her trustees to leave her sizeable house, Grey Lodge, in Wellington Street, Dundee, to be used as “a centre of social activity” and her will left provision for establishing a fund for carrying on social work in the city - which it has continued to the present day. Meanwhile the Social Union’s work continued in partnership with that of Grey Lodge. In 1914 the Union organised a children’s clinic in Dundee and proposed to start a “small kindergarten school for poor children under school age.” Even by the Union’s pioneering standards, this innovative nursery provision was seen as “very experimental” (Minutes, 24.2.1914).

In conclusion, there is little doubt that Dundee Social Union was a key organisation in the city from the Victorian times through to the inter-war years, and, through its continuation by Grey Lodge Settlement, up to modern times. Its objectives and activities included:

- \* The work of the Housing Committee for the improvement of homes for Dundee’s poor.
- \* Investigations into the housing conditions affecting tenants of one and two roomed houses, ie, those mostly used by the working classes.
- \* A concern to save infant life and to protect young children, as well as to assist children who were physically or mentally deficient.
- \* The provision of change-of-air country holidays for invalid and delicate children.
- \* Provision for the occupation of infirm and invalid adults in Dundee’s poorhouse and hospital.
- \* Lectures on subjects of social and economic interest, with a view to encouraging their systematic study by Union members.

As well as successfully networking with other women’s groups, the Union also formed a valuable partnership with the Town Council. In 1910 the Union’s superintendent Mary Lily Walker organised a Conference on Child Life in Dundee which appears to have gone some way to enhancing links between the Town Council and the welfare organisation (*Dundee Yearbook*, 1910, p99). In

1914 the Town Council joined with the Union in funding the Infant Visiting and Mother's Restaurant. The minutes in 1917 allude to the fact that "work among children hitherto conducted by the Union was now being taken over by the municipal authorities" (Minutes, 26.4.1917). By then Dundee Town Council had taken over the three baby clinics established by the Union in the city. In 1924 the committee noted proudly, "The crippled children, the nursing mother, the welfare of infants, were three all-important branches of work begun by the Union," and though now taken over by the Town Council or other agencies, they "had the credit of initiation."

Dundee Social Union also set out to establish firm guidelines for the future of healthcare in the city. In 1918, for example, it established a Diploma in Social Economics in partnership with the University of St Andrews (Dundee) and the Grey Lodge Settlement. The Dundee School of Social Studies duly opened in October 1920 with seven students (Minutes 12.10.1920). Although its overtly political role was limited, its minutes in 1919 contained a resolution to "urge upon the Government the desirability of prohibiting the sale of intoxicating liquors during the war, or for an experimental period of six months." In 1927 there was a suggestion that "the prospective parliamentary candidates should be given an opportunity to stay in the settlements throughout the country with a view to studying industrial conditions in the various towns."

A curious minute in 1923, following the Union's 35th AGM, said, rather humbly, that it "seemed to have the tide of public opinion with it." Three years later Dundee Social Union amalgamated with Grey Lodge Settlement.

### **The Churches in Dundee**

According to Brown and Stephenson (1992, p90) "Neither in the study of religion and the churches, nor in feminist studies, has there been significant research into the historical dimension of women's religious experience."

Indeed, these authors conclude (ibid) “the most profound ignorance prevails in relation to religion and the working class.”

The churches in working-class Dundee from 1870 had great social concerns and most played a significant role in providing social services in the city, with or without the sanction of the city fathers. The sheer scale of the Roman Catholic population in 1871, some 16,000, the majority of them women, meant that quite sophisticated organisations existed to promote poor relief and to help in times of domestic trouble. The evidence indicates that social causes were close to the hearts of a number of clergymen, too, not least the Rev Henry Williamson of the United Presbyterian Church who became a member of Dundee Parish Council and President of the Mill and Factory Operatives' Union. Today the Williamson Memorial Church in the city invokes and maintains his memory.

But, if Dundee could throw up a singularly unique politician in the zealous prohibitionist Edwin Scrymgeour, contemporary records show that it also possessed a church which clearly espoused progressive politics among the working women of the city. The Gilfillan Memorial Church church, then and today, is linked to the name of the man who arrived in Dundee to give the women a completely new direction, the Rev George Gilfillan, a remarkable pioneer for religious liberty.

Clearly Gilfillan's reforms at his School Wynd United Presbyterian Church in the city in the 1870s did not go down well with either Dundee Presbytery or the UPP ministry in Edinburgh. That Gilfillan was popular among Dundee's working people, however, is in little doubt. He spoke to public meetings at the mills regularly from the 1870s on and he married so many couples of the poorer classes - 20 couples one Saturday evening - that he came to be referred to as *Buckle the Beggar*. His church was most generous to the poor - the minutes in 1881 showing that 18 women were helped with 10 shillings each, the

equivalent of a week's wages in the low mill (Gilfillan Church Committee Minutes, Oct 1881).

Gilfillan, who died just after the turn of the century, and whose funeral was marked by a procession of 30,000 people in Dundee, had long since nominated his own successor, the Rev David Macrae. It was Macrae, along with 600 parishoners, who took on Gilfillan's memory and legacy to found the Gilfillan Memorial Church in 1879. Macrae's rejection of church dogma resulted in him being obliged to sever his connection with the established church. His congregation found themselves with a choice between church or minister, and they chose the latter. But they also then found themselves without any place to worship as their church was returned to the United Presbyterian Church. Macrae set about raising funds to erect a completely new church, sending out "young women in pairs" to collect contributions. In 1881, for example, 25 women were despatched and raised £500 (*Congregation Report*, 1881, p6). Remarkably, the new building was opened in 1888. By this time, the members "were the working folk of the city" (ibid). One minister complained in 1890 that "one Sunday the services were attended by 1,600 persons, while the amount in the plate worked out at 1,300 pennies," which serves perhaps to highlight the working class economy in that part of the city as well as the popularity of the church itself (Gilfillan 1879-1979, p11 & 21). But annual reports regularly mention donations to the Female Rescue Home, the city's Poor Fund, and the Free Breakfast to the Poor mission.

Macrae was heavily politicised and many of his sermons related to local affairs, not least the drunkenness and crime he witnessed around him in the heavily populated slum city centre. At local level he was determined that the Gilfillan Memorial Church would not be a one-day-a-week church and he encouraged mill workers to use it on Saturday evenings in the hope that it would curtail their drinking. To this end he put on concerts and recitals. "His speeches were filled with figures calculating the amount wasted on drink in

the city” (idem, p13). 1. Macrae spent 18 years shaping the Gilfillan Memorial Church to his own design, taking over when it was penniless and homeless. He died in 1907.

In September 1897, the Rev Walter Walsh was elected “by a comfortable majority” to be Macrae’s replacement, and he took over the following month. Dundee-born Walsh, described to the parish committee as “a political and social reformer” came from the Northern Baptist Church at Rye Hill, Newcastle, where “he had worked for the social improvement of the working classes” (Minutes 1.11.1897). He was welcomed by a congregation which had expanded from around 500 in 1895 to 1,200 in 1897. It was run by (mostly male) elders and managers, but it had some 50 female Sunday School teachers (*Congregational Report*, 1881), women temperance workers and “lady visitors” who probably inspected the aforementioned applications for poor relief. It should be noted that around 60% of the adult congregation was made up of women (*Congregational Reports*, 1880-1898).

Early in 1898, however, 35 male elders and managers of his congregation resigned after a stormy discussion over financial matters. Eighteen members were removed from the Communion Role, but they refused to give up their membership to the church and the dropping of the roll to 958 the following year suggests that the split had a damaging effect. A lengthy legal action ensued. 2.

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1. Alcohol abuse, of course, was no stranger to public consciousness in Dundee, where the Scottish Temperance Society was based. Brown and Stephenson (1992, p117) have expanded on religion’s links to the temperance movement. “The religious temperance environment offered women a legitimization of their worth in a society in which other fountains of self-esteem may have been few in number.”

2. The Gilfillan Memorial Church’s long-running dispute went to the Court of Session in Edinburgh in 1912 and Lord Cullen found in favour of the 10 complainants. Two days later the managers of the Church decided to abandon the name Church of Today. Walsh was evicted and began preaching in the Kinnaird Hall. Gradually, however, congregations returned to the Gilfillan Memorial Church, although Walsh became a sidelined figure.

Meanwhile, Mr Walsh persevered with his politicisation of the Gilfillan Memorial Church in Dundee. In June 1900, the congregation by standing acclaim passed a resolution to petition Parliament in favour of the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors to Children (Scotland) Bill, the object of which was to prohibit the sale of alcohol to those under 16 years of age (Minutes, 10.6.1900). He preached on the excessive number of public houses in the Greenmarket area next to his church (there were 11 pubs), and distributed 300 copies of the church magazine *For The Right* in the district every month (Minutes 17.2.1902). In 1903 a correspondent writing in the *Dundee Advertiser* lamented the situation among the city's lower classes:

“A spinner of 15 may earn 11s per week, and after paying her share to the family exchequer, manages to keep 4s or 5s to spend on amusement. Many indulge in tasteful dresses for the evening parade or Sunday jaunt, but almost all on pay day visit the public house with unpleasant regularity. It soon becomes no shame to a mill girl to be seen drinking and drunk, and drink is resorted to as the readiest means of amusement.”

*Dundee Advertiser* 13.11.1904

In 1904 Walsh proposed extra Sunday evening services to see if “that would bring more of them out” and he prepared a new hymn book costing just one penny to encourage the working classes to participate (Minutes 28.2.1904). In 1904 he suggested that the “reign of God is certain but the Liberal Party, as at present outlined, will advance it but very little” (*For the Right*, Dec 1904). In 1906 he made 506 visits to Church members. He continued to take an interest in wider issues. In February 1904 he led a protest from the pulpit against the introduction of Chinese Labour into the Transval gold mines “in the name of the sweated Kaffir, the plundered Boer and the British workman.” When he asked all those in favour of his motion, “the whole congregation stood up” (Minutes 28.2.1904).

Walsh was a key player in the creation of the Dundee and District Jute and



Flax Workers' Union in March 1906, attending the founding meetings and appearing on the platform with Mary Macarthur. In November that year he became a Labour town councillor and supported Alexander Wilkie in becoming the city's first Labour MP. In 1908 he became Dundee's first Town Council housing convener and put forward plans for new homes for the working class (Walker, 1979, p390). A pragmatic social reformer within the bounds of his own parish, Walsh also travelled to International peace camps in Boston in 1904 and Philadelphia in 1908. When he became chairman of the Scottish Prohibition Party in 1902, he explained to his congregation that it was simply an extension of his ministry.

Brown and Stephenson have explained the attraction of such a church to working women: "As children, working class women often had an indigenous enthusiasm for religious events, and independently sought out and made choices as to which organisations and occasions they attended. The spectacle of religion was more emotionally as well as socially appealing than the 'ordinary' and mundane events of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church" (ibid, p117). In terms of becoming involved in an institution which promoted female collective decision-making over a range of "women's issues" concerns, the Gilfillan women certainly contributed to alleviating social concerns: the *Congregation Report* makes many mentions of its women-only Dorcas group making donations of tea and sugar, coal, bread, clothes and money to the poor gathered in the heavily-populated working class sector around its doors. In turn it can be assumed that its liberalist culture was not only a well among mill girls who drunk deeply from its promise of respectability, but one which provided them with, perhaps, a thirst for political engagement.

It was important, too, not to lose sight of the presence and power of the Roman Catholic Church in Dundee. Murray and Stockdale (1990, p10) have spoken of the Catholic numbers in Dundee, some 38,000 in a total population of 180,000 in the 1890s for example. And while these authors, and Walker (1979, p130),

have recorded that the Irish population in Dundee was in a large part controlled ideologically and politically by priests, who were mostly Irish themselves, the Catholic populations in suburbs such as Lochee and the Hilltown of Dundee established many welfare organisations, particularly for women, which mirrored the work elsewhere of Dundee Social Union. Walker (1979, p129) cited: "a St Vincent's Hostel for respectable working girls, a Catholic Day Nursery, a Working Mother's Restaurant and a Social Club for Girls."

It is interesting to note that Murray and Stockdale (p11) wonder whether the fact that the majority of the Irish mill workers came from the south of Ireland contributed towards the absence of "excesses of sectarianism" experienced in the west of Scotland. Walker held a similar view (p121) saying, "That there was no effective Orange outpost in Dundee must go far in explaining the relative absence of Irish sectarianism in Dundee."

The fact that the vast majority of the Irish immigrants to Dundee were women, unlike Glasgow, Greenock, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen (Census 1871), was probably of as much significance.

### **Dundee Women Citizens' Association**

This section is taken up with one organisation, the Dundee Women Citizens' Association (DWCA) and uses contemporary records which are rare and important, given the dearth of extant material on post-suffrage women's organisations. This association is relevant for study because, as Sue Innes pointed out (1998, p151), "there is no recent account of the Women Citizens' Association" and because DWCA acted as a women's forum for action on matters such as housing, education, child law and social improvement in the years immediately after the First World War, when women had been placed in a wide spectrum of new roles. In Dundee and further afield there is a paucity of research on autonomous women's organisations during this post-suffrage

period in relation to political activity, and their bearing on feminist theories. Importantly, one of the key concerns of the Dundee Women Citizens' Association was women's political representation and a key objective was to enlighten and systematically educate women about the new-won vote and to prepare them for an active role in local and parliamentary political assemblies.

Thus this section targets a central aim of this thesis; that is, to explore Dundee women's access to, and performance within, decision-making elites. Using the experiences of the DWCA membership, this section also sets out the women's relationship to current thinking on equality and difference feminist theories. Finally, it investigates the conditions in which the solidarity, influence and collective action of the DWCA could be considered "women's politics" at a time when much of the influential work carried out by the branch did not fall within conventional definitions of "political" activity.

It has been shown above how the striking feature of employment in Dundee during the study period was the extent to which the city depended on manufacturing industries, principally textiles. It is worth noting again that the Census of 1911 showed that nearly 70% of the total occupied population of the city was employed in manufacturing, compared to 32.4% in Edinburgh, 48% in Glasgow and 36.4% in Aberdeen. Thus, Dundee had a ratio of around twice as many workers in manufacturing industries than had Glasgow and Aberdeen.

Also recorded was the fact that the vast majority of workers in manufacturing in Dundee were women textile workers. By examining the professional classes for the same year, 1911, it can be seen how Dundee had a relatively insignificant middle class (or professional) sector compared to other Scottish cities. In 1911, public and administration services accounted for only 3% of the total occupied population in Dundee, compared to 11% in Edinburgh (Census, 1911). Certainly Dundee had greater female employment than any other Scottish city at this time (43.7% in Dundee, 37.1% in Edinburgh, for example), yet the

nature of employment contrasted considerably. As noted, Dundee women worked in textile mills and factories to an overwhelming extent. By contrast, many women in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen found work in domestic service. In 1911, indoor domestic service provided one third of the jobs for women and girls in Edinburgh, but only 6% in Dundee (Census 1911).

Such figures serve to indicate the important social differences between Dundee and the other Scottish cities at this time and provide some evidence of the absence of a sizeable middle class in the city, which, indeed, is confirmed by the relatively small numbers of manufacturers and professional people listed in trade directories for the city between 1870 and the 1920s. Given this evidently small middle class sector, it can be argued that the fact that several hundred women, apparently from professional and leisured backgrounds, gathered in the city in 1918 to enlist in a new quasi-political autonomous organisation, is extremely significant.

The Women Citizens' Association was launched by Eleanor Rathbone in Liverpool in 1913. Miss Rathbone believed that women needed "educating in citizenship" before they were ready to use the vote (*National Women Citizens' Association*, 1968, p3). But it was not until women over 30 had got the vote, with the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1918, and after their lives had been changed dramatically during the First World War, that a national women's movement capturing Rathbone's ideas evolved. The Women Citizens' Association was created at a meeting in May 1918 in Caxton Hall, London, and grew rapidly. Its aims were to pool the energies of various women's groups "in developing educative work on women's citizenship, and on the methods of the new voting power given to women" (ibid, pp3-6).

From its inception, the Women Citizens' Association never attached itself to any political party. Thus, recalled its president 50 years on, "before party politics affected local government, it was able to work for, and support women

(many of its own members) at local elections with great success” (ibid, p4). Indeed, local WCA branches were left free to govern themselves within the framework of the national body, if they so desired. To a considerable extent the Dundee branch followed this model.

In the early 1990s, executive committee minutes of the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association were donated to Dundee City Council by Mrs Elizabeth Tomlinson, then in her late eighties but still active in the organisation. Though previously unresearched and largely untouched in the tin box in which they were given, the archives proved to offer a fascinating and valuable insight into the period immediately after some women were given the opportunity to vote.

The diverse activities of the newly-enfranchised women proved to be a revelation. Their urgent concerns over their lack of representation was paramount. Their lobbying role as a result of those concerns was meaningful and effective. The belief that there was a need for a new organisation to unite women was only surpassed by the impact of the branch on the development of welfare services in the city, as their direct impact on social conditions show. And the fact that the branch was viewed as the “body representative of the women of Dundee” is of paramount importance (Minutes, 14.5.1934).

Examination and analysis of these important points will dispel the notion that women in the period 1918-1945 were apolitical, or reserved “political” participation to home and hearth as the enfranchisement seemed, to them, an “empty” victory. On the contrary, the archive of the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association reveal the scope and variety of an organisation whose members were determined to motivate change through collective lobbying and to grasp power through representation over a long period.

Their records show that soon after its foundation in March 1918, the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association was gifted a room at 30 Meadowside, Dundee

(the branch bought its own premises a decade later) and its members resolved to meet once a fortnight. Some 10,000 leaflets were printed and distributed with the purpose of urging the city's women to join the association. Three thousand leaflets were sent to Miss Walker, secretary of the Dundee & District Mill and Factory Operatives' Union. Others were dispatched to the Scottish Domestic Servants' Society, the Scottish Women's Friendly Society, gasworkers and Post Office employees, calender workers' unions and labourers' unions (DWCA Minutes, 3.3.1918). Clearly the new association of women was determined to cast its membership net wide - and across the social spectrum. Within a month, the DWCA had over 500 members, rising to nearly 800 by the end of the first year (DA 10.6.1919).

In addition to the scale and diversity of the new branch, a further notable feature at the organisation's outset was the range of subjects discussed by the branch members and the contrast between the new organisation and other women's groups in Dundee at the time - such as the Dundee Women's Liberal Association - and its much closer resemblance to the suffrage societies which had had a presence in the city from 1906. Leah Leneman has noted (1991, p216) that "many members of disbanded suffrage societies joined newly-created Women Citizens' Associations." Sue Innes also found in Edinburgh WCA a sprinkling of former suffragists and suffragettes (1998, p160). This appears to have been the case in Dundee, where several high-profile members of the DWCA had previous experience in suffrage societies. A Mrs Mill, a leading non-militant suffrage activist in the years prior to the First World War, became the DWCA's first president. She was joined on its executive committee by Agnes Husband, the president of the Dundee branch of the Women's Freedom League. Enid Renny, one of eight suffragettes to chant songs eliciting Mrs Pankhurst's freedom from prison during a church service in 1914, became another of the leading figures in the DWCA's executive (DC 25.5.1914).

Interviewed in 1997, then aged 94, Mrs Elizabeth Tomlinson, a past president

of the DWCA said: "There is no doubt in my mind that our branch was formed by women who were very sympathetic to the suffrage cause, and that is why politics played such an important part of the branch work." Although there is evidence in the DWCA minutes and annual reports of an overlap of membership and considerable gender solidarity, the First World War led to a watershed in women's organisations in Dundee. Many supporters of equal franchise followed the Pankhursts' call in 1914 to suspend political activity, and, especially, militancy. 1. In Dundee, for example, the Dundee Women's Suffrage Society offered its entire organisation, including its offices and staff to Dundee Town Council to help the war effort. Whereas, the Women's Freedom League continued to exert pressure on Government over a range of women's issues (Banks, 1993, p11-12).

Representation, however, was still a fundamental aim when Dundee Women Citizens' Association was formed at its first meeting in March 1918 and set out its formal constitution. Its objectives remained unchanged until the 1960s. These objectives were to bring together on non-party, non-sectarian and democratic lines all women's societies and individual women. The organisation drew its income from membership fees and donations and was open to women over 18 years of age. Its specific aims were to:

- a) Foster a sense of citizenship in women.
- b) Encourage the study of political, social and economic questions.
- c) Secure the adequate representation of the interests and experience of women in the affairs of the community.

(Minutes 9.4, 1918)

The branch was normally structured into six sub-committees - education, health, housing, temperance, local government and citizenship propaganda, which essentially looked to increase branch membership while promoting access to citizenly activity generally. In the years that followed, these key concerns were accorded high priority by the WCA membership in Dundee.

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**1. Several Dundee suffragists knew the Pankhursts intimately from their sojourns to Dundee to bait Churchill between 1908-14.**

**Education** often focused the minds of the Dundee branch in its formative years and gender equality in education was frequently its central concern. Members resolved to pressure Parliament to ensure that the 1918 Education Bill contained equal numbers of women and men on committees, the appointment and status of women school inspectors and equal facilities in technical classes for boys and girls. In February 1919 the secretary sent a strongly-worded resolution to every Scottish MP and to the Scottish Education Department:

1. That the Dundee Women Citizens' Association respectfully urges his Majesty in Council in appointing the Advisory Council on Education for Scotland to ensure that it shall be composed of men and women.
  2. That the Scottish Education Department be urged to issue a circular to the new Education Authority as soon as they are elected informing them that no scheme for the constitution of school management committees will be approved which does not provide that the membership shall comprise a fair proportion of women and that the mothers of the pupils shall be as adequately represented as the fathers."
- (Minutes, 6.2.1919)

No response is noted in the Minutes, but the women in the WCA Dundee branch consistently pressed to extend women's influence in educational matters. When two vacancies appeared on Dundee's Education Committee in 1923, for example, the branch chairwoman thought that "this was an opportunity for the association to nominate a woman candidate" and that this "should be done at once." When a Mrs Baird Johnston, a future chairman, agreed to stand, her decision was met with "much enthusiasm and it was agreed by the executive committee that "everything should be done" to secure Mrs Johnston's election (Minutes 17.9.1923). When Mrs Johnston failed to be elected in November that year, the DWCA expressed its "sincere regret."

Linked to education was the women's desire to protect and enhance the upbringing of children. Prior to a talk on "Careers for Girls" from Frances Melville, a former university suffrage leader and honorary president of the Glasgow WCA, the Dundee branch circulated notice of the meeting to "some of



the schools, the teaching college and public library” (Minutes 17.3.1924). In 1924 the branch campaigned to keep Dundee Nursery School open and, that year, argued publicly against Sunday trading by ice cream shops “particularly because of the undesirable influence which it is felt these places exercise upon the habits of children” (Minutes, 23.6.1924). In 1925 the branch executive empowered a Mrs J. Thomson to make inquiries into “child assault” in Dundee - a term which included child abuse (Minutes, 3.3.1925). In February 1927 it sent a letter to the Secretary of State and Dundee’s two MPs protesting against young children being allowed to assist in potato gathering. Generally, then, the women consistently took into account the welfare of children and the promotion of equitable education into their work and ideals.

Educating its own members, especially towards the goal of participatory citizenship was also important within the branch. In tandem, it sent speakers to other women’s or welfare organisations, and lobbied groups such as local authority officers and committee members. Thus, skills which may have been developed in work among the bodies referred to in the previous chapter - Dundee School Board and Dundee Parish Council - were deployed and networked.

***Housing*** was also a key concern as the branch was mindful, no doubt, of the work of Dundee Social Union in highlighting the plight of thousands of overcrowded mill workers in the city. In September 1918, just six months after its launch, the DWCA produced and issued 20,000 handbills drawing attention to its housing meeting, including 5,000 which the Mill and Factory Operatives’ Union agreed to circulate (Minutes 3.9.1918). As it happened, women’s issues dominated that meeting’s agenda, with topics for discussion limited to: providing adequate accommodation, furnishings and rent relative to the earnings of single women, and those families consisting of parents and four children. The meeting resolved to firm up plans to ensure such provisions and to send the plans to relevant housing authorities. As housing and welfare matters fell

more under the control of local authorities, the association took housing matters directly to Dundee Town Council's (all-male) housing committee.

Proposals submitted by the women to the committee in February 1919 included, that:

1. Three women should be co-opted on to the housing committee.
2. Ground should be compulsorily acquired where necessary for house purchase.
3. One-roomed houses with a scullery were a necessity in Dundee for single women.
4. For a family consisting of four or more children, a four-roomed house was required.
5. Each house was to have a bath with hot and cold water.
6. Tenement houses were to be modified to two storeys and not three, and to have space for children's playgrounds.

(Minutes 6.2.1919)

Though such issues were a growing concern as women emerged from the single-issue suffrage period, the women were told initially that the town council had no power to co-opt women as members (although their other points would be considered). In February 1920, however, the association was informed by the council that women were to be co-opted on to the housing committee with immediate effect (Minutes 16.2.1920). Undoubtedly this represented a significant victory - it would be another 15 years before a woman won election to a place on the full council.

Housing was a national concern at this time. The extent of Scotland's slums was examined in the Royal Commission Report on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland in 1917. Standards targeted by the Housing Act which followed in 1919 stated an ideal minimum of four apartments per dwelling. This was viewed as essential to secure the proper segregation of sleeping arrangements. No doubt bearing in mind that Lennox (1905, p139) had shown that only 20% of the 22,314 women mill workers between 14 and 45 were married and living with their husbands, the DWCA took the view that what Dundee needed was far smaller houses in tenements to cater for its independent female textile workforce - and in the summer of 1921 it wrote to the Scottish Board of Health to that effect. That very few of the municipal houses

built in Dundee in interwar years were of the four-apartment minimum recommended in the 1917 Housing Act - only 16.6% of a total of 8,374 houses - suggests that the views of the DWCA prevailed.

The women had successfully shown that the smaller houses were of more use to the working population both in terms of family size and rent. This is borne out in the comment by Dundee Town Council's housing convener in 1923:

"Every councillor knows that the need is for a smaller type of house and at least at a rent suitable to the income of many who receive very small wages....letters pour in upon me asking for this type of house....I am personally heckled in favour of such houses."

(Dundee Courier, 6.6. 1923)

In terms of housing provision, this was not an isolated victory for the women. When the Fleming housing estate was opened in Dundee in September 1929, the gift of London merchant bankers Robert Fleming, whose founder was proudly a Dundonian, members of the DWCA were invited to attend by the city's housing convener. They responded to the invitation by commenting publicly that the scheme "dwelt on the enormous blessing conferred on so many single women workers by the one-roomed houses." <sup>1</sup>

The Fleming trustees themselves commented at the official opening: "A great many of the up-to-date dwellings....are beyond many of those who toil in the mills and factories of the great city. Dundee has a peculiarly large percentage of such people, and the number of widows and spinsters so employed is abnormally high" (*The Fleming Gift*, 1929, p11). Afterwards, the DWCA secretary was asked to convey to the convener "the appreciation of the WCA of the houses for single women" (Minutes, 3.11.1930). Only weeks' later, however, the DWCA, never an organisation to miss an opportunity, sent a resolution to the

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**1. The Scheme, when it was officially opened, contained 192 one-room houses, 128 two-room houses and 104 with three rooms (*The Fleming Gift*, 1929, p10).**

Fleming trustees that “in view of the large number of tenants provided for by the Fleming Trust, this society strongly urges the appointment of a woman trained in social work and property management” (3.2.1931). Additionally, members campaigned to get elderly Dundee women into rest home accommodation in 1921 “in the same way as there is for men.” The authorities conceded the point (Minutes 7.2.1921).

*Local issues* were to the fore in the “politics” of the Dundee branch of the Women Citizens’ Association. Much of the members’ time was taken up with improving the fabric of city life. For example, in October 1918, the branch was asked by Post Office women officials to investigate the proposed curtailment of the city’s evening tram service. The branch did so, on the grounds that the trams were “an absolute necessity for business women.” Within days the DWCA won a reprieve from the local authority tramways’ department (Minutes, 21.10.1918). In 1920 the DWCA sent a deputation to the tramways’ committee of the Town Council requesting them to prohibit any person worse for drink from travelling on tramcars (the minutes mention that women had been threatened). In due course, the association was told that tram conductors were to be instructed that the bye-laws prohibiting drunk people from travelling on trams were to be reinforced. And by June that year the Town Council confirmed to the women that “several fines had been imposed on drunken persons for boarding tramcars” (Minutes, 16.2.1920, 1.3.1920 and 21.6.1920).

In investigating and commenting upon social behaviour, the branch was also in the forefront of Dundee’s celebrated prohibition movement. Indeed, they marched under a temperance banner in the No Licence processions in Dundee in 1920 and in 1923. The executive committee agreed that members could help to distribute No Licence literature in the centre of the city (Minutes 21.6.20 and 17.10.23). This provides a useful example of networking women’s groups.

Another example of the women’s lobbying powers over an issue which engen-

dered wider women's support came in 1933 when the branch sent a deputation of three women to discuss the introduction of women police officers in the city. When the chief constable responded by telling the women that he "did not think the time was right for women police in Dundee" (Minutes, 8.5.1933), a second meeting was arranged and a formidable deputation, comprising representatives of the DWCA, the National Council of Women, the Salvation Army, the Alliance of Women and the Juvenile Organisations' Committee, led by Mrs Lumsden of the DWCA, met with the chief constable to discuss women police officers again. Presumably as a result of this meeting, and considerable national pressure, he agreed to the appointment of one such officer and this was duly confirmed (Minutes, 7.6.1934).

More mundane local matters frequently occupied the DWCA executive committee and the 1000-strong Dundee membership. In March 1919 one member referred to the "low taste that prevailed in music and films in Dundee." She thought action should be taken by the WCA with the view of having "improved films introduced" in the city (Minutes 14.3.1919). In the event the executive committee decided to poll the entire cinema industry in the city. Members visited 32 local cinemas and formed lists of what was acceptable and what was not. Some 64 films were watched, 15% were found to be vulgar or slightly vulgar and 5% objectionable, "either from the point of being suggestive, inciting to crime or frankly immoral." The committee considered a general raising of the tone was desirable and the cinemas were informed - and while there is no suggestion of coercion on the women's part, monitoring was promised. In 1930 the branch sent a strongly-worded letter to Dundee Town Council arguing for "children to be excluded from picture houses" when films for adults were being shown" (Minutes, 13.1.1930). A second cinema survey was carried out the following year.

This intervention could be interpreted as moral censorship with perhaps the women justifying the label of middle-class watchdogs of improper behaviour.

However, the action of the women links with their concerns with welfare and social conditions in Dundee at the time. The executive committee minutes give the impression that the members were generally methodical, hard-working and resourceful while responsible, and took their self-appointed civic roles seriously.

It is important to point out that the Dundee WCA branch was also independent in outlook and action in terms of wider organisation. When, for example, the Edinburgh WCA proposed an amendment to a national council resolution on Lady Astor's Solicitation Bill in November 1926, the DWCA decided to make a study of the laws and their working in Dundee and to find out if "in our opinion" the Edinburgh amendments were "needed and practical" (Minutes, 4.11.1926). A member, Mary Stephen, subsequently consulted with Dundee's chief constable, and the members expressed themselves satisfied that the laws in Dundee were sufficient to deal with all prostitution cases (Minutes 4.11.1926). Curiously, Mahood reported (1992, p47) that in Glasgow between 1920 and 1925, "18 per cent of the girls in Maryhill had been found living in brothels." Soon after, two DWCA members were dispatched to the national council meeting to oppose the Edinburgh view. 1.

***Representation***, and the important question of access and women's place in politics, was a key concern of the Dundee branch of the Women Citizens' Association and this involved, put simply, increasing women as representatives on bodies of influence. There is no doubt that the DWCA was keen to promulgate women's political and social influence throughout the city, not least in equality and welfare issues. In January 1919, for example, the executive elected a sub-committee to look for women candidates for municipal School Boards and

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1. Also in 1926, a member of the executive committee in Dundee expressed regret that the Scottish WCA Council meeting, held twice a year at that time, tended to overlook business sent in from associations other than Glasgow or Edinburgh "for want of time." The Dundee executive wrote to the WCA national council to suggest "that in future, the business on the agenda for council members be so arranged as to be capable of being carried through within the stipulated time" (Minutes, 4.11.1926).

Parish Council elections. Fifteen women from the membership were put forward for the former on February 3, a further 12 names on February 17. At that time female representation on Dundee School Board and Dundee Parish Council was limited to a handful of women (see Chapter Five). Agnes Husband, the DWCA vice-president was the first woman to sit on both the Dundee Combined Parish Council and also Dundee School Board.

When DWCA was formed in 1918 only two of the 15 members on Dundee School Board were women, Miss Husband and Minnie Kynoch (*Dundee Directory*, 1918-19). There was better representation on the Parish Council. Of 31 members, five were women (ibid). With much social power accredited to these elected bodies, there is no doubt that the WCA felt that an increase in representation was desirable to offset what they considered at their meetings to be not so much a problem of overpowering male dominance, but simply something that women should do, and would be good at.

Perhaps emboldened by securing *ad hoc* co-option to the Town Council's housing committee in February 1920, the women requested in writing the same month to be co-opted on to the directorate of Dundee Royal Infirmary, until then (from 1855) a male-only board (DRI Governors' minutes 1920-1930). The reply from the DRI board was less than satisfactory in that it said that six governors of DRI "fail to be elected as directors each year and that in the opinion of the directors, all governors are eligible to election as directors" (Letter to DWCA executive 16.2.1920).

This was thought by the DWCA to be something of a smokescreen and they decided that the "matter might be looked into." This they did, to discover that anyone could become a governor of the hospital by subscribing one guinea. It was considered advisable that four women do so immediately, thereby securing directors' voting rights. In May 1922 two members of the DWCA were formally appointed to the infirmary's board.

The records indicate many areas of representation and access which concerned the members. On matters of health generally, the branch wrote in angry terms to the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1919 indicating that “this Association regrets to see that no woman has been appointed to the newly constituted Industrial Fatigue Research Board in view that much emphasis was laid on bringing women’s point of view on matters affecting health.” No reply is noted. On finance, it wrote to the city’s two MPs, the Liberal Winston Churchill and Labour’s Alexander Wilkie, “that this Association urges that the rates of taxation applicable to men in the Services be made applicable to women” and that “when a board of health is appointed for Scotland, at least one third of its number should be women” (Minutes 17.3.1919). When the Board of Health for Scotland was established a year later, it included only one woman, called Miss Ritson.

Similarly, DWCA’s minute books reflect a willingness to engage other campaigns and reforms. The Association supported the Scottish Federation of Women’s Suffrage Societies with regard to women in Scotland being unable to practise as law agents and advocates (Minutes 7.4.1919). In this the branch was supported by the *Dundee Advertiser* in a conciliatory Leader comment:

“Although the male solicitor may view with some apprehension the encroachment on his special preserves and probable shrinkage in his earnings, he would do well to recognise that there is no sound reason why the woman who is qualified to act as a solicitor should not be allowed to practice. So far as the public is concerned, it does not matter in the slightest whether the solicitor be man or woman.”

(Dundee Advertiser 6.3.1918)

In these cases, the considerable and often extraordinary impact of this practically-minded and enthusiastically-potent group can be gauged. It is also interesting to use these examples to show the broad concerns of the women. There is no indication from the DWCA minutes that the members’ political or social aspirations were either narrow or class driven, at this time at least.



Representation in municipal elections was another key concern of the DWCA, although, at first, there appears to have been some confusion over the aims of their involvement. For example, a large meeting of women electors in the city's eighth ward was told by Mrs Mill, the DWCA chairman, "We don't want class against class (applause). We don't want man against woman, or woman against man, working man against shopkeeper; we want the best all-round man" (hear-hear). Only then did Mrs Mill suggest that perhaps the best person to serve the interests of women would be "a woman" (DA 29.10.1920). A pamphlet entitled, *The Need for Women in Local Government* was sold at the DWCA meetings from December 1923.

In November 1929, three women were asked to stand for Dundee Town Council by the DWCA executive, but all declined. We may deduce tentatively that it was probably the case that the WCA's non-party constitutional rules ensured that only Independents could stand (Lily Miller stood unsuccessfully for Labour that year, backed by the Trades Council) and Innes has said; "In clinging to independence women were swimming against a tide which saw party machinery strengthen" (1998, p180). Notwithstanding, the executive wrote to the Town Council urging them "to co-opt to its committees suitable women with knowledge of the subjects concerned" (Minutes 19.11.1929). The civic fathers promised to do so. In a telling remark in October 1931, Mary Fairweather, the president of the DWCA at the time, told her executive committee that "all women citizens ought to be interested in the question of women on town councils, these days especially, in view of the need for economy" (Minutes 5.10.1931). It is no surprise, perhaps, that Florence Horsbrugh was given such a resounding parliamentary vote that year to become Dundee's first (and only) woman MP.

Such was the interest in women's role in the community that evening classes were formed to study social questions and to learn to discuss them in public. By March 1920 the Speakers' class had a membership of 50 and had held 15

meetings - and the executive committee duly noted that the class also helped people “form opinion” on many public questions of the day. The topic for the annual conference in 1920 was *Women in Public Life*. Thus, in the first years of its existence, it can be deduced from available records that the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association was an organisation preparing women to take a public role in the life of the city.

In charting this evolution, however, it is useful to explore briefly whether its early promise as a quasi-political women’s forum was the result solely of the momentum generated by early enthusiasm. It is perhaps in the nature of such groups that the spontaneity and creativity of newness gives way to a change of direction or, indeed, a degree of apathy. On the other hand, it was arguably the women of Dundee who acted cohesively at the polling booths in 1922 to elect Edwin Scrymgeour, the man who most espoused what the DWCA stood for: affordable and appropriate housing, equity in education and the curtailment of the social ills of public drunkenness.

It is also worth noting that the Dundee branch was affiliated to the National Women Citizens’ Association, and that several submissions and resolutions were clearly a rubber stamp of those taken at national level. That Dundee was an active branch and often acted autonomously is not in doubt either, however. By December 1918 there were WCA branches in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock, Inverness, St Andrews and Leven - strangely not in neighbouring Perth, very much a middle-class city - but Dundee was the only Scottish branch affiliated to the UK national body.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, when 37 nominations were read for the members of the National WCA Committee that year, Dundee was the only Scottish branch shown on the list (Minutes 14.7.1918).

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**1. Sue Innes states (1998 p58): “There is no record in the EWCA papers of any association between Scottish WCAs and the London based NWCA.” Clearly Dundee was a notable exception.**

Indeed, the Dundee committee later expressed to the national body its hope that the AGM would be held in provincial towns as well as in London, and it was a contender for the Scottish Women Citizens' Associations' inaugural meeting in 1920, a year after it was formed, and duly staged its second annual conference in 1922.

Despite this apparent popularity and the populist appeal which attracted in excess of 1,000 members, the DWCA executive committee clashed frequently with individuals as well as organisations - and sometimes this included other women. It repudiated, for instance, the actions of a Mrs Ogilvie Gordon, who had claimed that the women of Scotland "did not want" a separate Ministry of Health Consultative Council (Minutes 7.4.1919). It took issue with the Scottish Eastern Association of Medical Women over the inclusion of school medical services within their remit (Minutes 7.4.1919). The DWCA felt this should remain under the control of the education authority.

Another medical matter serves to illustrate the extensive influence of the Dundee branch of the WCA at this time. In May 1919 one committee member, Mrs J. Thomson, brought to notice the exclusion of women doctors from the Dundee Infant Hospital, which had been founded five years earlier by two Dundee women doctors, under the guidance of one of Dundee's most distinguished daughters, Mary Lily Walker (Minutes 5.5.1919). By 1919, however, it was staffed by three male doctors. The DWCA wrote to the hospital management committee that "in the treatment of children, women doctors should certainly not be excluded." A copy of the letter was released to the Dundee Press (DA 9.5.1919). Within a week women doctors resumed duties at the hospital.

The foregoing serves to introduce the objectives and work of the Dundee Women Citizens' Association. But it is important in the context of the thesis to place the organisation into the wider spectrum of politics in Dundee. In the early days of the Dundee branch, the Press reported meetings in brief form.

Reports tended to suggest that the women were not regarded as a mainstream lobby group. For example, when the DWCA held a fund-raising event in September 1919, the Dundee Advertiser ran the headline, "Charming Garden Fete at Craigiebarn" (the baronial-sized home of one of the members), (DA 15.9.1919). The paper led with an account of what the organisation's office bearers were wearing. Thus, for instance, the DWCA president, a Unionist campaigner, one-time parliamentary hopeful and indomitable fighter for women's rights, wore "a trim coat-frock of black silk Jersey cloth, cut in the new straight silhouette effect, with smart ribbon and net hat, also in black, the only note of colour being found in the posy of delicate pink carnations nestling on the lapel of her frock." Thus V.B. Pirret, vice president, was "in a beautiful pale fawn gaberdine costume, worn to splendid effect with a scarf of cream tulle, and hat of black and gold net." Miss McIntyre, DWCA joint-president, wore "a tailored suite of navy mirror velvet." And Miss Taylor (hon-secretary) "came in a smart helio frieze costume with overcloak of purple, with this was worn a silver tissue toque, veiled white and black tulle and finished with a posy of pink rosebuds." We can assume that the paper's political correspondent was elsewhere that day. If he had been present he would have heard the guest-of-honour, the Dowager of Airlie, provide a more appropriate description of the organisation's work: "The women of today have grasped the significance of having the vote entrusted to them, and this Association has guided those who had the vote, and trained those who would get it." The threefold object of the organisation was, she continued, "to band together all women interested in Parliamentary, municipal and parish matters and to further these interests" (DC 15.9.1919).

Perhaps it was irresponsible to treat this way a group which had in excess of 1,000 members split into a dozen active wards in the city at this time. In fact, at one point the women complained about coverage in the local Press (Minutes, 30.3.1925). By the 1930s, however, a typical report of branch activities would read, "Activities of Dundee Women Citizens - Work Amongst Unem-

ployed” (1933, undated cutting, Lamb Collection). Throughout these formative years the Dundee branch of the Women Citizens’ Association strived to break down patriarchal barriers, increase representation and improve social conditions in Dundee. Yet, the data provided on women householders in Dundee, when taken along with their onerous working conditions and domestic responsibilities, (see Chapters One and Four) raises the possibility that because most Dundee women’s lives were organised around these demanding roles, they were not considered as natural political allies by the DWCA, more a group to be helped (often at a discretionary distance) as and when need arose - though the branch did establish keep fit, shorthand and embroidery classes for unemployed girls during periods of high unemployment in 1933 (Minutes 3.11.1933). This does not mean necessarily that practical help was denied to working class women, but gradually it appears that the branch was content to impose moral codes on all women, regardless of social standing. In 1921, for example, the DWCA supported the Guardianship, Maintenance and Custody of Infants Bill, which sought to place more domestic responsibility on mothers, even though a vast number of young Dundee mothers had to work to survive, and it sent submissions to the Prime Minister and to the city’s two MPs urging them to support the proposed legislation (Minutes 6.4.1921). 1.

Overall, it can be concluded from evidence that the Dundee Women Citizens’ Association was a distinct and determined force for women’s political progress in the years after 1918, the year of the first gaining of the vote for women and the legislation which allowed them to be elected as members of Parliament. In size alone, it attracted a typical membership of around 1,000, when membership in English branches was between 60 and 80 (NWCA, 1968, pp12-16). The Dundee members were effective moral guardians and sponsors of welfare initiatives and, in 1934, were described in correspondence with Dundee Town Council as “the body representative of women in Dundee” (Minutes 14.5.1934).

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1. It would appear that this was national policy.

That the DWCA had a parliamentary political outlook is also clear. In July 1918 the committee placed an advertisement in local Dundee papers drawing the attention of women voters of Dundee “to the necessity for seeing that their names were on the register before July 17,” and inviting those whose names were omitted “to come to the office” for election advice. The branch formed an “election policy” in 1918 which included housing reform, recognition of the dual parenthood of every child, temperance and equal pay for equal worth. It agreed to arrange a conference on housing before the election, in order that a uniform statement could be presented to the candidates.

The question of whether a woman candidate should stand at Dundee was raised at a meeting on November 18, 1918, just months after The Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act had allowed women to be elected as members of Parliament. A debate took place over whether this would be a good thing, but it was agreed that such a project “would not prove advisable at the present time” (Minutes 18.11.1918).

Catriona Burness (1992, p165) has suggested that such a decision would not have been out of the ordinary: “The lack of women at Westminster does not seem to have been a burning issue over the period (1918-1922). The great triumph was the winning of votes for women.” Nonetheless, the DWCA sent speakers around every municipal ward in Dundee to explain the method of voting in elections. In January 1920 it sent four women to Dundee Business Club to discuss the by-election in Dundee that year. In October 1921 it was decided to “observe carefully all special Bills, as well as Bills of national importance and Bills concerning women.” That month, the 32-strong executive committee was told to “prepare for a General Election.”

The organisation’s records indicate a plethora of positive political activity. In December that year, for example, the branch signed a petition to the Prime Minister urging him to extend the franchise to women on the same terms as it

was granted to men (Minutes 5.12.1921). On December 8, 1924, the executive committee agreed to “assist those women in Dundee who were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections and who had difficulty in getting their names on the roll.” A study circle was formed to examine Bills and Acts (Minutes 29.3.1929). These are important milestones in the pressure towards political access and representation.

And yet, because the association by its own rules was apolitical, the branch was reluctant to back individual candidates (unless they were standing as Independents), and the failure of the DWCA to promote or exploit parliamentary opportunities owes as much to this as to any lack of motivation on the women’s part. It is clear from the branch archive that the Dundee women rigidly adhered to their constitutional position (eg 3.10.23) - unlike colleagues elsewhere. Sue Innes cites an instance in 1922 when the Edinburgh Women Citizens’ Association appeared willing to secure the election of women candidates prepared to follow the WCA programme. But the *Scotsman* declared that “supporting women because they were women and opposing the (Unionist) candidate because he was a man, was tantamount to creating a women’s party” (quoted in Burness, 1992, p160). Catriona Burness reveals, however, a situation in the Edinburgh South Ward in 1922 where the EWCA endorsed the Liberal candidate. Several members of the association resigned over how far they could go as a non-party organisation.

In fact, none of the WCA branches in Scotland, which totalled 20 by 1931, was particularly successful in getting women to Parliament, which is interesting in Dundee’s case given the efforts the branch made to place candidates on the School Board and Parish Council in particular. As Burness points out, only eight women became MPs in Scotland between 1918 and 1945.

Prior to concluding this section, it is useful to return to the views of Mrs Elizabeth Tomlinson, aged 94 when interviewed in 1997, when she lived in Servite

Housing in Dundee with her husband Clarence, 98. At the time of interview, Mrs Tomlinson, a past president of the Dundee WLA, remained an active and alert member of the branch. 1. At the time of writing the branch had around 60 members and met weekly. Its annual syllabus included speakers from a wide range of specialities and examples seen included a number of political topics.

Mrs Tomlinson joined the DWCA in 1928 after moving from Forfar to Dundee to take up a position as a pharmacist. Although it should be borne in mind that she was recalling memories over some 70 years, she was able to describe the years during which women had become citizens with voting rights where groups had been actively working for the vote, efforts were redoubled to make sure women's votes counted..... "My principal interest was in legislation and I chaired the branch legislative committee for many years. In those days our scope of interests were very broad. Sometimes we were not taken seriously but we plugged away, and we wouldn't go away. There were two important fronts. At national government level we made representations, with varying success, on issues such as working hours for women, nursery care and child adoption. We were also keen to make inroads into areas of employment for women, such as the police.

"Secondly, we were always on at the council in Dundee to improve things, and this ranged from litter to housing. Another important point is that we carried out a great deal of voluntary welfare work to help groups like the elderly and those in hospital. We raised quite a lot of funds for various good causes." 2.

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**1. When the national council disbanded in 1990 it had around 10 affiliated branches, according to Mrs Tomlinson.**

**2. In 1925, for example the branch donated £1,300, a sizeable amount, towards the establishment of a home for the mentally ill at Larbert, as part of a national campaign - Minutes 19.11.1925.**



Mrs Tomlinson recalled that the Second World War interrupted branch activity, and, on a personal note, her work as a pharmacist was important. She continued: "Soon after the war the branch was very active again and we still had hundreds of members. I think this is when it perhaps developed more into a speakers' club and one of my jobs over the years was to recruit speakers. As the numbers of branches dwindled, we in Scotland were arranged into four area committees of Women Citizens' Association. We became the North East Area, and comprised Arbroath, Dundee, Forfar and St Andrews.

"In more recent years our local campaigns have concentrated on issues such as dog fouling, and the provision of facilities for women or disadvantaged groups. Sometimes we were successful - such as with dog fouling - which brought about the introduction of new by-laws, but, on other occasions, we have had to keep the pressure on. An example of that is the provision of bus shelters in Lindsay Street (a popular embarkation point for bus tours). We wanted to protect people from the elements but the council said they couldn't pay for the shelters. They suggested we tried to get sponsorship for them. I don't know the latest on that. But I think that even latterly, when our numbers have not been nearly as great as in the pioneering days, we have been recognised as a responsible organisation and people have taken notice of our recommendations."

Mrs Tomlinson confirmed that during the period between the wars the DWCA did much to promote women's role across a spectrum of interests. That its members were largely middle class is not in doubt, given the addresses of members listed in the committee minutes for this period, and from her first-hand observations. That is not to say that early overtures to the city's working women went unheeded. Furthermore, as Mrs Tomlinson suggested, much of the branch's good works remained connected to the plight of the poor and underprivileged in Dundee. In 1923, for example, it protested loudly against women being kept in prison before their cases were heard, or on remand

where no woman official was in attendance (Minutes 8.10.1923). The branch also argued that women should normally be put in charge of women in such institutions.

As Mrs Tomlinson pointed out, by the mid-1920s many of the original aims and objectives of the Dundee Women Citizens' Association began to waver, or indeed had been achieved, while arguably its influence remained. In 1925, for example, the health and housing committees were combined into a single committee, the local government and parliamentary committee had only nine members, the speakers' class had fallen into abeyance and when it was reconstituted in 1925, it was called "a discussion circle" (Minutes 14.9.1925). That year there were no volunteers to help raise funds for the Grey Lodge social work settlement founded by Mary Lily Walker (Minutes 20.5.1925).

These incidents should not be seen to belittle the membership's achievements, most notably in its first two decades of activity. The branch scrutinised every possible avenue of representation and succeeded in encouraging women into Town Council committees, the Parish Council and Dundee School Board. Members of the DWCA were also appointed or elected to the local Employment women's sub-committee, the Dundee branch of the Women's Education Union, the National Council of Women's executive committee - and such appointments provide us with useful examples of women's groups networking as well as women accessing positions of power and influence.

Politically, there was constant pressure on Dundee's MPs and successive Secretaries of State for Scotland on a range of issues. In 1919, for example, the association wrote to Prime Minister Bonar Law and to the city's MPs saying that the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Bill, aimed at abolishing existing restrictions upon the admission of women into professions and occupations, was unsatisfactory.

The letter urged that it be amended to include:

1. Votes for women on the same terms as men.
  2. The admission of women to positions in the Home Civil Service on the same terms as men.
  3. The eligibility of peeresses in their own right to be members of the House of Lords.
  4. To delete the clause giving judges the right, at their own discretion, to set up juries of one sex.
- (Minutes, 7.10.1919)

In looking at the activity of the Dundee Women Citizens' Association we can also witness women determined to prove themselves by overcoming gender differences while, on the other hand, involving themselves in a range of equality and welfare concerns. That differences existed in the first place sits comfortably with the arguments espoused by "difference" feminists: namely that sex difference, whether the result of biological factors or as a result of socialisation, is relevant to issue of equality, and equality (as it stands) disadvantages women. Where difference feminists see equality in form if not fact, is for example, in types of welfare work. If equality with men is "irrecoverable," perhaps because men's needs are different, or more because these needs are perceived somehow as "natural," then women can pursue a distinct and separate culture based on perhaps their reproductive roles and natural caring instincts. Thus, the members of the DWCA, while shrinking away at first from the formal arena of politics, busily involved themselves in many acts of social improvement, for example in areas such as housing and education with specific reference to conditions in "Juteopolis" at the time.

It is evident that the branch doggedly pursued equal standing and full representation in otherwise male dominated activities and organisations - witness their insistence on placing women on the board of governors of Dundee Royal Infirmary, for example. And it can be claimed of such activity that the members of Dundee Women Citizens' Association repeatedly crossed the divisions in competing feminist theories.

## **Dundee Soroptomists: “A club for women”**

As the records of the Women Citizens’ Association show, women were reluctant to give up the position they had won in providing various forms of service to the community in the years immediately after the First World War. Thus the presence of a collected gender consciousness can be shown in the campaigning work of, for example, the DWCA.

In more recent years, an example of an organisation which helped to co-ordinate clusters of women and which networked with women’s groups is Dundee Soroptomists.

The ideals of Soroptomists, from the Latin, *soror optima*, or best sister, were geared to cement women’s high-profile role in society, and the new organisation crossed the Atlantic in 1924 when the Greater London club was established to push for female recognition and participation in the post-franchise years. Clubs were formed in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1927.

In 1932 a group of women met in Mather’s Hotel with a view to starting a branch in Dundee. Twenty-five signatures were secured and a club formed in April 1932, the 23rd to form in the UK (Minutes, 29.4.1932). Its inaugural lunch was held on May 25, 1932, setting a pattern for fortnightly luncheons. 1.

For the purposes of this thesis, the committee minutes and archives of Dundee Soroptomists were made available for the first time. They provide a valuable contemporary insight into a period in which women were making telling inroads into male bastions of power and influence.

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1. Dr Edith Philip Smith, a prime mover behind the creation of the branch, became the British Soroptomist Federation president in 1945.

According to the branch silver jubilee commemoration booklet (1992, p7) "The social climate of the period was very different to that pertaining today. The women who were the founding sisters of the Dundee club were far-sighted people who had a vision of the place women should be taking in the community." The branch objectives were described in a committee minute in 1932.

"To encourage and foster high standards in business life; to promote the spirit of service and true friendship among its members; to encourage civic movements for the betterment of general social conditions; and to urge co-operation for the the betterment of local conditions; to encourage the spirit of friendship among representative women of different nations in being conducive to international peace." (Minutes 20.4.1932)

Bruce Leneman (1969, p10-14) discusses the impact of jute on Dundee and remarks on the constriction of Dundee's other traditional industries because of its impact in the city. "Trades which had collapsed included coarse woollens, buckle-manufacturing, leather goods, bootmaking, sewing threads and sugar refining." It is interesting to note that the Dundee Soroptomists' names register for the first session, 1932-33 show the following occupations, signalling a widening not only of professions in Dundee, but a significant increase in occupational choice and a departure from Victorian dependency and stagnation.

Stationer	Solicitor	Piano teacher	Cashier in coal
Doctor	Newspaper proprietor	Infant teacher	Warden
Chemist	Beauty specialist	Wool specialist	Factory inspector
Milliner	Needleworker	Teacher	Public health worker
Masseuse	Anaesthetist	Gown specialist	Journalist
Teacher	Dentist	Hairdresser	Lecturer
Merchant	Timber worker	Hostel warden	Bookseller
Painter	Welfare superintendent		

**(NB active membership was restricted to one woman from each profession or business.**

Each meeting brought forth a variety of speakers, include those describing other socially-concerned organisations in Dundee, such as Grey Lodge Settlement, the city's unique centre for social work. An indication of branch concern with unemployment in the 1930s, for example, is shown in the donation of "6 doz cups and saucers" for use at the Mutual Service Club for Unemployed Women" (1992, p20), and the President's report in 1937 said that the branch was "mainly concerned with the welfare of women and children as I feel befits a club of women. I think we have helped where needed" (Minutes 2.5.1933). The following year's president reinforced the growing branch involvement in the city's affairs. "Our status in the city, I feel, is more definite and secure as time goes on. We seem to be reckoned as a representative body of women citizens in Dundee, whose co-operation is invited in civic matters, and whose assistance is asked in social service" (27.4.1938). It is of significance to note the President's remark about the branch representing women in Dundee in 1938, at which time there were still some 25,000 women involved in the jute industry while, that year, the Soroptomists had just 56 members from different occupations and professions. The parallel (or parallel evolution) with DWCA is also worth recording.

On the political front at this time the branch took a keen interest in the career of Dundee's female Member of Parliament, Florence Horsbrugh. 1. In 1933, soon after her election to Westminster, she was appointed Dundee Soroptomists' first honorary member. It was also noted when she was appointed a Privy Councillor, and pleasure was expressed when she replied to the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament. In handing over the club badge to Miss Horsbrugh, the branch president said, it "was the visible symbol of something for which Miss Horsbrugh had always stood as a shining example, the work of women for women, and through women, for humanity" (Minutes, 3.2.1933).

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1. As there are no direct references to canvassing in the minutes, it is doubtful, given its small size, that the Dundee branch of Soroptomists could have made a significant impact to Horsbrugh's elections to 1945.

Formal political concerns cropped up from time to time - the branch even wrote to the Canadian authorities in 1933 complaining that, "due to the narrow mindedness of the Government where women were concerned, pharmacy was not open to women in Quebec" (Minutes, 9.3.1933). In 1962, it urged the UK Government to consider the serious effect early marriages were having on professions "extensively staffed by women." Another resolution urged the Government "to reconsider salaries and conditions of service" in hospital ancillary services. However, the women's concerns with social and welfare issues can be seen through their commitment to various organisations, and they provided funds and expertise towards many worthy causes from 1935 - with a particular interest in supporting the "mentally deficient" girls at Baldovan School, Dundee.

As they broadened their outlook on many issues, networking with like-minded organisations appears to have been a Soroptomist strength. In 1945, for example, the Dundee branch was instrumental in forming a Standing Conference on Women's Organisations. Thirty-two groups from around Scotland attended. A resolution was put forward that the Soroptomists "make a survey of social conditions in Dundee" (Minutes 25.4.1945). No results of this survey, if carried out, appear in subsequent minutes and the intervention of war is a possible explanation. <sup>1</sup>

Another cause which resulted in cluster support among women's organisations was housing, and in this the Soroptomists shared aspirations with both Dundee Social Union and Dundee Women Citizens' Association. The Soroptomist archive reveals that the branch was concerned with post-war housing

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1. There is little reference to branch war-time activities apart from a resolution to meet as usual and to respond to appeals for aid as received. This the branch did, at one point adopting the Royal Navy ship *HMS Dundee* and keeping its crew supplied with an assortment of homely items. Money was also collected among Soroptomists nationwide to provide ambulances, and the minutes note that the Dundee donation of £100 was one of the highest. It despatched woollens to the Women's Voluntary Service, Red Cross and Navy depots and sent money for the Polish Relief Fund. Members were encouraged to give blood.

allocations as early as 1947 and set about buying a mansion house to convert for “the later years of lonely ladies.” In 1962, a sub-committee appointed to discuss possible social service activity, found that the needs of home-bound people made a clear aim on voluntary service (Minutes 1.5.1962). It was not until 1969, however, that the branch had sufficient funds to allow the formation of a formal housing association, Soroptomist Housing (Dundee) Ltd, and a three-storey terraced villa in the west end of the city was purchased the following year and converted into bed-sitting room flatlets.<sup>1</sup> In 1988, a considerable sum was left by a former branch president which enabled the branch to provide residential accommodation, which included facilities for the provision of hot meals and warden services. In 1992, a complex was opened containing 16 flats for retired professional or business women, with priority given to Soroptomists.

If the passing of time has blunted the political edge of this women’s organisation, it has not removed its welfare and citizenly concerns. Known since 1974 as Soroptomist International of Dundee, it has recently (1998) undertaken a mould-breaking study into children’s labour in Dundee, the findings of which were provided to police and social work departments, and which were later brought to public notice in newspaper articles.

What is clear from this first examination of the Soroptomist archive is that such work continues the pioneering approach developed to such telling effect by Dundee Social Union, the city churches and the DWCA. Where a difference lies, however, is that the women of Soroptomist International of Dundee have gone on to challenge and breakthrough the so-called “glass ceiling” of women’s access. The constitution of Soroptomists allows for women to represent individual careers or professions. To begin with, in the 1930s, few women held

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**1. The minutes do not make it clear exactly who was intended to benefit from this initiative: whether, for instance, the branch shared the DWCA and Dundee Social Union’s concerns over the provision of single-room accommodation for single working women.**



executive posts in the business world and many of the membership were in eminent positions, such as doctors or university lecturers, or were directors of local firms. Soon, however, individual members began to make dynamic contributions to their chosen fields. The first club president, Dr Edith Philip Smith, was a pioneering university lecturer in botany. The first treasurer, Miss Christian Bisset, became the first woman (as Mrs Christian Tudhope) to hold the position of Depute Town Clerk. Professor Margaret Fairlie, chair of obstetrics and gynaecology at Dundee University, and Scotland's first woman professor, was a member in the 1940s. Catherine Scrimgeour, branch secretary from 1946-53 was the first local woman to head a legal practice in Dundee. Miss Eva Laburn, the first woman to train as a chartered accountant in the city, was club president from 1961-63. (Source: branch cuttings book, and reports.)

In as such, the Soroptomists have kept the flag of women's organisations flying high over Dundee, promoting gender equality and participation in local affairs with determination and due diligence.

## **Conclusion**

Little-known archives of community organisations such as Dundee Social Union and the Dundee Women Citizens' Association (DWCA) were examined in considerable detail to determine whether activity which might be defined "political" was taken on women's behalf or by women. Alice Brown (1999, p5) has claimed that while the representation of women is important in itself, "the representation of women's interests and concerns are also of relevance to women activists." Issues and obstacles impinging on representation are also relevant to social historians for the reason that much of the activity of groups displaying resilience and fortitude in progressing women's interests are forgotten in history. Such is the case with Dundee Women Citizen's Association, and

even the remarkable and pioneering work undertaken by Dundee Social Union is lost among modern histories telling Dundee's story. Such organisations demonstrated clear thinking on key issues such as representation and social welfare, and in doing so, add to our own thinking and understanding of the women's movement. Among the charitable, religious and political groups, for example, DWCA was shown to be a woman's organisation, with women's interests; one which retained its autonomy and individuality, but one which was able to network with other like-minded groups - and possibly its largely-middle class, non-party profile helped in this.

There were strengths and weaknesses in this area of research, however. The minutes of the DWCA was a rich seam of information and, diligently mined, they should provide a valuable primary source for future generations of students. Unfortunately, it proved difficult to find substantive evidence to consolidate brief references to a Working Women's Guild in Mary Brooksbank's short autobiography (nd, c1973, pp36&37), and it was not possible to substantiate her claims that "we numbered 300 strong" without corroborating evidence. Two letters containing my requests for information were published in Dundee newspapers but failed to elicit further information about this group. It is probably the case that it had strong links to the local Communist branch, however. There is certainly more scope in researching Irish (Catholic) immigration to Dundee while, during an examination of minutes of Dundee Royal Infirmary (and also a mill manager's notebook at the University of Dundee) the extent of women's mill injuries seemed a fascinating subject which would benefit from specific research.

Noted, also, was a tailing off in political attitudes in both the DWCA and Soroptomists. In relation to this Olive Banks (1993, p25) has described a post-war lack of confidence among women in terms of feminist goals. She suggests (p71) that many who had worked for women's suffrage "believed that they had won a significant victory." I think this may have had some bearing on attempts

to organise women candidates in the subsequent period in Dundee, but it is possibly worth bearing in mind that no women's issue dominated this period which could compare to the Edwardian votes-for-women struggle, and it was inevitably more difficult for post-suffrage women to attempt to mobilise large-scale support.

What is left is a valuable insight into a period that Sue Innes (1998, p151) has described as marking the "decline of the women's movement," and a feminist movement which "found itself with a confused heritage of arguments" for individual equal rights and for the special protection of women as a sexually and economically vulnerable section of society (Rowbotham, 1992, p121). On the contrary, the primary source material examined in this chapter provided a record of extensive campaigning on a range of important issues, including female access to powerful male-only bodies and social provision for women workers. The material also revealed considerable networking and boundary crossing among and within women's organisations - although arguably it was very limited between different classes of women - and perhaps this was due to an unease among mill women that privileged women would not necessarily help specific industrial grievances. But dressmaker Agnes Husband was able to move with apparent ease between her roles in the Parish Council and School Board, to become a key figure in the suffrage movement, and then an executive committee member of the DWCA.

So Chapter Six showed that distinctions between voluntary welfare associations, in which women were involved, and political pressure groups, were often blurred. If the view is taken that this activity is outwith formal politics, it cannot be left unsaid that the women's issues addressed by these autonomous women's groups concerned the sharing of political power. Indeed, their formidable presence and impact in Dundee not only entered the local state, but it can be argued that it laid the foundations of how local government would shape in the years ahead.

# **Chapter Seven**

## **New Industries - new horizons**

### **Introduction:**

So far, this work has examined the political history and early organisation of women in Dundee in fledgling late 19th century and early 20th century trade unions; their role during the struggle to win parliamentary votes; their part in the election of Britain's only Prohibitionist MP and the election of the city's sole woman MP in the year the city had 62,709 female Parliamentary voters against 46,563 males; and their record in municipal elections. It has looked also at the activities of elected organisations in Dundee, and in particular at women's groups such as the Dundee Women Citizens' Association, in an attempt to address the fundamental issue set out in Chapter One; namely whether Dundee was a "woman's town" in more than name and reputation.

The thesis has established that considerable political energy was expended and channelled through the prohibition, temperance and suffrage movements as far as Dundee women were concerned, while a key thread which runs through the work so far is the link of such activity to the city's dependence on the textiles industry, principally jute.

Chapter Seven records the decline of this manufacturing monolith in Dundee and the subsequent rapid development of new industries. It examines whether the women who arguably failed to capitalise politically from a position of shop-floor strength in jute fared better in an era which coincided with electoral franchisement and advances in areas such as employment opportunities and equal pay. It seeks to determine whether female leadership emerged at this

critical time of social and political development within a reformed, revitalised industrial scene in Dundee. To this end it uses a variety of sources, including the first public access to some archives of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, which acted as a “closed shop” umbrella for many of those employed by Dundee’s incoming post-war industries, to illustrate action and activism which has struggled to surface in any work to date on Dundee.

### **The decline of jute.**

As early as 1892 the satirical weekly *The Piper of Dundee* was predicting doom and gloom for the local jute trade. It warned, “There are a hundred and one industries which would yield better returns than the speculative jute trade but Dundee still looks askance on all such ventures” (30.3.1892). Indeed, while reports of the industry’s demise in Dundee were a century premature, the paper’s leader columnist was correct in pointing out that the city had done little to widen its commercial base. By the turn of the century, when jute was becoming a cheap global commodity, slow progress had been made to attract new industries to the city. Dundee Social Union, in 1905, astutely pointed out the “crying need” for different jobs for men, while Dundee Industrial Committee (Minute, 18.6.1946) discussed a resolution that women should be employed only in “cases where men are not obtainable.”

The number of textile workers in Dundee’s occupied population fell from 40,000 in 1901 to 29,000 in 1931, (when Florence Horsbrugh became the city’s first woman MP) to 13,000 in 1961. Although a short-lived demand had pushed numbers up again to around 20,000 in 1956, by 1972 the figure had fallen to below 6,000 in the two remaining textile groups (*Census for Scotland*, 1901,1931,1961, *Dundee Directory* 1973). The stagnation in the jute industry and then its dramatic decline in the inter-war and post-Second World War period was the key factor in this.

Aware of impending industrial disaster, Dundee Town Council set out unashamedly to persuade captains of industry elsewhere that Dundee was ideal for investment:

“The Development Committee of the City of Dundee invite Leaders of Industry to regard Dundee as a possible venue for their developing industries. Though much is in their minds about the proud history and traditions of their City, yet little is said of that in this book. Their aim is to give an objective presentation of such facts as are vital to the decisions of those who either bear the responsibility of establishing new industries, or seek new ground for the development of existing industries.”

(*Do It At Dundee* nd, c1932).

It is slightly ironic that the publishers of *Do It At Dundee* decided to wrap its covers in jute, as it appears that Dundee Corporation engaged at first in a difficult task competing with other Scottish cities for inward investment, notably immediately after the book's publication when Development Area status had not been conferred on the city. But that situation was to change rapidly, as planners agreed with the authors of the *Tay Valley Plan* (1948, Vol 1, p55) “that to put most of the industrial eggs in one jute basket is extremely ill advised.” Indeed, by then, the jute industry had come through two world wars and was fatally wounded.

Between 1906 and 1930 no new jute mills were built and no significant extensions were added to existing premises. And, “no completely new weaving factories were built between 1914 and 1986, when Amoco Fabrics moved to West Gourdie industrial estate” (M. Watson, 1990, p21). The return of peace in 1918 was not met with jubilation in Dundee's paramount industry. A combination of overseas competition, principally from Calcutta (where, ironically, Dundee managers had helped to establish the industry), surplus post-war capacity and local labour difficulties - such as the major jute strike of 1923 - placed the

industry on a downward spiral. In 1920, seven major family-run firms joined to become Jute Industries Limited. When Low and Bonar amalgamated four years later, the two new groups accounted for 50% of all jute production (Whatley, 1993, p164). By 1931, unemployment in the industry had reached 50%. Dundee Chamber of Commerce noted (March 1958, p34), "Between 1931 and 1938 the low levels of unemployment never fell below 12,756 (1938)." The year 1931 provided the bleak peak of 38,500 out of work.

Even when re-armament in 1938 boosted manufacturing industries elsewhere in Scotland, lowering Scotland's average unemployment to just over 16%, Dundee's unemployment remained over 20%, with the rate in the jute industry itself in excess of 30% (Lythe, 1979 p85). By 1958 Dundee Chamber of Commerce noted (March 1958, p24) that "At one time half the insured workers of the city were engaged in the industry which today employs approximately 18,000 persons in Dundee - or just 21% of the working population of the city." And, for subsequent years, writer James Rougvie noted for Dundee: "The late 1960s and 1970s saw more than 40 firms in the jute and textile trade go to the wall," (*Scotsman*, 17.4.84), although Howe (1982, p72), for the same period, noted that "between the late 1960s and early 1970s 12 jute firms went out of business while others were acquired by larger concerns." The Census paints a clearer picture of the decline:

**Table One: Textile Employment in Dundee as a proportion of workforce.**

<b>1881</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>1911</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>1931</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>1951</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>1961</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>1966</b>	<b>15%</b>

Source, Carstairs, 1968, pp 320 and 329, and Sample Census for 1966 figure.

The rapid decline in the textiles industry impacted on Dundee's women. There was limited expansion in alternative full-time employment for them compared to other industrial centres at this time (Pugh, 1992, p21) - resulting in massive unemployment - until the post-Second World War period brought a rapid diversification of industry and jobs. As costs were reduced through Indian competition and the soaring price of raw materials, the demand for labour not only fell, throwing thousands of women out of work, but served to increase the ratio of men to women in the industry. According to the 1931 census, for example, around 55% of women were employed in Dundee. This fell by approximately 10% over the next decade to 45%, when the corresponding fall for males employed during the same period was only 5% (Burgh Plan, 1952, p31). Table Two below shows the trend convincingly:

**Table Two:** Occupation by gender in Dundee, 1929 and 1950

Year	Total Population	Insured Males	Insured Females
1929	175,600	35,966	33,323
1950	177,333	49,070	35,193

Source: City & Royal Burgh of Dundee, Survey Report, Feb 1952 p74)

Such figures contradict the widely-accepted view that Dundee's women had walked out of the kitchen and straight into jute jobs, thereby confining husbands to "kettle-boiling." Ruth Wishart, for instance, commenting on the inter-war years, claimed that "it was much easier for them (Dundee women) to get a job than their redundant husbands (*Alarm Bells Ring For Timex, Daily Record*, 13.3.1974). That was not the case. Total employment in Dundee textiles fell from 41,220 in 1924 to 27,980 in 1938 - a percentage decrease of 32% overall. The corresponding figure for the overall decrease in female employment was 39%. The total textiles labour force then fell during the 1939-1945 war from 26,000 to 13,000 (Carstairs, 1968, p323). During this period we can presume that the Services partly accounted for the fall in employment of 5,000 among men and youths. The Lord Provost's New Industries' Committee



(31.10.1946) noted that "Dundee's employment has kept pace with demobilisation. Men in jobs increased by 10,000 in the past year," while, at the same time, 8,000 women lost their jobs (Carstairs, *ibid*).

While the decline in jute job opportunities for women was to become key to the expansion of alternative work, it bears repeating that Dundee remained a "woman's town" in the inter-war years in terms of general population. The Census in 1921 showed that there were 93,636 females against 74,679 males (total population 168,315), while in 1931 the Census breakdown of population was established at 96,792 females and 78,793 males (total population 175,585, an increase of 7,270 or 4.3%). The 1931 figure constitutes a ratio of 122.8 females to every 100 males. The *Courier* pointed out that among the unmarried, including widowed and divorced persons, aged 16 years and upwards that year, there were 23,052 males and 39,496 females. "And by the simplest calculations it is found that if all the spare ladies married all the spare gentlemen in the city, there would be, roughly, 16,000 ladies left over" (DC 18.6.1932).

In part due to the decline of jute, but also to the general broadening of 20th century employment opportunities, the types of work in which Dundee women were engaged diversified. The same newspaper's post mortem on the 1931 situation commented, for example, "The inroads of women in every sphere can be noted. One lady comes under the heading of 'builders, bricklayers and stone and slate workers.' It would be novel and entertaining to see a lady brickworker at work. Thirteen ladies have become 'knights of the road' (drivers) and 20 are stated to be 'barmen'. Against that there are but seven males to over a thousand women engaged as charwomen or office cleaners. There are no men typists in Dundee but only one of the fair sex is working as an oiler and greaser" (*Dundee Census Features*, DC 18.6.1932). Certainly by the time the Second World War was in progress, job opportunities were opening up for the city's women. The *Evening Telegraph* commented (12.4.1941), "The war is offering girls many opportunities to step into jobs where, in normal times they

could not gain entry.” But while the Ministry of Labour’s reserved occupation lists did cause war-time diversification, 1. by far the single largest employer remained jute, an industry where a female workforce existing in troubled times often on a perilously a low wage. Besides, jobs taken by women during the war were frequently ephemeral, as Sheila Rowbotham (1992, p248) noted, “During World War II, the wartime state could never decide whether it wanted Rosie to be a riveter or a mum.” Coincidentally, an anonymous tape recording in the Dundee Oral History Project (but probably Bella Kayser, the celebrated Dundee welder) highlighted the difficulty faced for a woman to find a job similar to that which she was given as a war-worker:

“You’d go forward with the letter to the desk and the girl would say...heavens it’s a woman and I addressed that letter to Mr....well, right this way and see the personnel, and the personnel wis sitting agasp, agog, ‘is eyes wide, mouth open, and tryin’ tae be as if there wis nothin’ had happened...like a dust tornado hadna come intae ‘is office, and they said ye have very good experience ye know, ye’ve had very good experience, in fact ye’ve had the, the, the, accordin’ to yer letter, ye’ve had the most experience fir anybody that’s applied fir the job up tae date, but I’m afraid you’re a woman, so here wis me, with an ability, but because Eh wis female Eh wis not goin’ to be allowed to earn the money that a man made. Eh wis never goin’ tae come out o’ this category of a low-paid female worker.”

(DOHP 022/B/2:24)

Bella Kayser, who worked as a war-time welder in the Rob Caledon shipyard in Dundee, did publicly reflect on the difficulty of retaining such work in peacetime... “I was thrown out of the shipyard after the war. The trouble was

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1. The paper commented on how the latest job to be “taken over by women” was that of cinema projectionist. But the chairman of the Dundee branch of the Cinematographers’ Association observed: “The girls may be good enough to run a show as long as there is no technical hitch, but if something goes wrong they’re flummoxed.” When it was pointed out that, under Home Office regulations there had to be always three people in the projection room, and one of them had to be over 25 and fully trained, he replied, “How we could do this with girls is beyond me.” (ibid) Perceptions did change, but slowly. Commenting on the first of Dundee’s women railway porters in February 1941, a male colleague said, “I’ve seen them haul barrowloads of luggage that I never thought a woman could have moved. I always thought a woman was a weak creature, meant to stay at home, but I’m beginning to change my opinion” (PJ 22.2.1941).

that no-one was willing to pay a welder's wage to a woman, always a women's wage." She eventually returned to the Caledon Yard as a welder, and got proper wages for the job.

Protection steadied the city's jute industry after the Second World War and the heavy unemployment witnessed during the Depression gradually improved. (In fact Jute Control lasted until the 1960s.) But the decline of Juteopolis was unstoppable and, by the 1970s in any case, many jute products had succumbed to synthetic textiles. A pamphlet entitled *The Future of Jute*, published in 1944 by the Dundee Communist Party, provides one contemporary explanation of the difficulty the industry found itself in. Written by David Bowman, later a Communist parliamentary candidate, but then aged 32 and a member of the National Union of Railwaymen, it concluded that Dundee had "exported" its skills to India. Bowman, however, addressed the industry's illnesses positively. He urged the replacement of old, out-dated machinery, the building of new factories and mills, and the adoption of new technology. But he also derided the mill bosses for not improving working conditions, not adopting a 40-hour week or higher wages, and not providing "decent canteen facilities."

Ironically, it was precisely these factors and facilities which contributed to the success of the city's second industrial revolution when, once again, the women of Dundee went out to work in significantly large numbers.

### **Development status**

Although some new industries arrived in Dundee as a war measure, a full redistribution of labour did not take place until after the Second World War as a result of the 1945 Decentralisation of Industry Act. Through this Act, and because of what was perceived as a worsening situation of unemployment in the city's jute industry, Dundee was awarded Development Area Status. In

1945, the Board of Trade enlarged upon this in a letter to Sir Garnet Wilson, Lord Provost of Dundee :

“The great dependence of Dundee on the jute industries constitutes a problem which the Board of Trade fully recognises ... and it is clear that a more balanced distribution of industry is something which they (those interested in Dundee’s welfare) would very much welcome. To achieve this, not only should existing industries in the city be encouraged to expand, but every effort must be made to attract new industries.” (New Industries’ letter book 8.8.1945)

To this end, the Board of Trade was empowered to build factories and to lease them to approved tenants, as well as to introduce measures to assist indigenous industries and companies. As a result, several new commercial concerns arrived in the city, attracted by advance-built factories, the prospect of low rents - and a ready pool of labour. Within a quarter of a century from the point in September 1942 when “only 442 people were working in the new concerns” (Dundee Chamber, 1958, p35) inward locating companies, with several from the United States leading the way, 1. had broken Dundee’s traditional manufacturing stranglehold and had provided 11,400 jobs, or around 12% of the city’s working population. Table Three serves to indicate the impressive increase in work in new engineering industries deployed in Dundee - though it can be assumed that the source included new companies engaged in the electronics field.

**Table Three:** Distribution of working population, Dundee  
jute & general engineering, 1939 and 1950.

	<u>July 1939</u>	<u>July 1950</u>
Jute	27,478	15,566
General engineering	2,069	10,197

Source: City & Royal Burgh of Dundee, Survey Report, Feb 1952, p76

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1. Dr J.M. Jackson (1979, p156) believed that one of the attractions of Britain for American companies at the time was that “it afforded an entree to the Commonwealth market.”

## **The new companies**

Very little has been recorded about the companies that set up in Dundee after the Second World War, companies which added breadth to the city's industrial base and offered new hope for thousands of families firmly anchored in textiles. Enid Gauldie, for example, stops her 1969 discourse on Dundee textiles in 1885, William Walker completes his 1979 study of the jute industry at 1923, and Eleanor Gordon, in 1991, goes no further than the First World War in *Women and the Labour Movement*.

This important section draws upon company records, newspaper cuttings, oral testimony, the journals of Dundee and Tayside Chamber of Commerce and the archives of local branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, made available to the public only in February 1998, to draw conclusions about the significant impact made on new industries by the city's women. It begins by looking at 10 of the largest employers setting up in Dundee from 1940.

i. *Burndept Limited* was one of the industries which relocated to Dundee as a war measure. In 1941 its production base was Kent, where it made batteries for the wireless equipment used in tanks and aeroplanes. The factory was bombed in April, 1941. From the rubble came lorry loads of rusted, twisted and seemingly useless scrap metal. The loads were deposited on 100,000 square feet of a former jute factory in Dundee which Dundee Town Council had provided for the Ministry of Supply for bombed-out industries. Burndept's workforce increased steadily - from around 400 in its formative years, to 600 ten years on. In 1961, Burndept Ltd became Vidor Ltd, by which time it employed over 1,000 people in Dundee over peak periods and by which time it had become the largest dry battery factory in Europe. Vidor was taken over by Royston in 1962, then Crompton Parkinson in 1968, when it had a workforce of around 800. It closed in 1983 with the loss of its remaining 240 jobs.

ii. *The National Cash Register Company* (NCR) is one of the largest single

employers in Dundee today and is a world leader in the manufacture of automated banking machines, which it exports to over 100 different countries. NCR, an American company, came to Dundee in 1946 and was located in a factory at Camperdown on the city's outskirts producing, in the main, accounting and other office machines. According to its staff magazine (1946-1951) it employed 317 people by the end of that year, 700 by January 1947 and over 1,000 by the end of 1948. By November 1951 it employed 1,873 people. Employment peaked at 6,350 in 1969, although, as computerised equipment was introduced in the 1970s this total declined steadily. Some 1,200 workers were made redundant in 1971, another 800 in June 1975. The company currently has a Dundee workforce of around 2,000.

iii. *Veeder-Root Limited*, another American concern, arrived in Dundee in March, 1947, after a site selection battle with Wales. It began production of counting and computing devices the following year with a staff of 100 in a 15,000 sq ft factory. By the 1950s Veeder-Root Ltd occupied a 116,000 sq ft factory on Dundee's new Kingsway industrial estate. By 1968, it had extended seven times, with a major new factory at Gourdie industrial estate, to manufacture highly-specialised mechanical, electro-mechanical and electronic fluidic-type counting devices, many of them used in garage forecourt petrol pump heads. In 1971 the company moved its headquarters to Dundee from Croydon. By 1973 it had expanded to a physical presence in the city of 200,000 sq ft. In 1980 the company had a workforce of 1,200 in Dundee and it reached its milestone fortieth year in the city in 1987 when it still employed 400 people, despite advancing mechanisation and computerisation. The factory closed in the early 1990s.

iv. *The Astral Company* of Dundee became Britain's biggest refrigerator manufacturer. Astral set up in Dundee during the Second World War, starting production at Marine Parade, Riverside, where it initially employed 40 people, almost entirely ex-servicemen. Astral, which became part of the Morphy

Richards group in 1955, made spectacular headway. By 1961 it had opened its fourth factory in Dundee in Gourdie, West Kingsway, and had a total workforce of 1,500 people. This building covered eight acres and was, at the time, the largest single factory in Scotland. There, in 1963, the company produced its 100,000th fridge while Astral spin-dryers rolled off the production line at its Longtown Road factory at a rate of one every two minutes. In 1966 production of refrigerators ceased and the company, with employees now numbering 700, switched production to electronics for Associated Electrical Industries (EMI) for a short time before the factory closed permanently.

v. Out of a former jute mill grew the modern factory of the old-established firm of *L.S. Meyer (London) Ltd*, manufacturers of the Glen clock. Mayer's clock production in Dundee began in 1946, when the company found that it was unable to meet the expansion in demand which occurred with the return to peacetime conditions. Meyer first occupied a mill in Edward Street, in the centre of Dundee, before moving to a peripheral industrial estate in 1954. From there the company served both industrial and commercial markets. Products included leather goods, typewriter cases, shaver cases, cosmetic cases and small metal souvenir objects.

vi. *Hamilton Carhartt Limited*, a textiles company, moved to Dundee from Liverpool in 1942 as part of the growing decentralisation from large cities under dispersal of industry legislation. Originally Canadian, the firm was by this time entirely British owned. To launch its Dundee factory, Carhartt sent north a nucleus of staff - 25 executives and workers, including just eight girl machinists. By 1951 it had a 60,000 sq ft modern factory and a workforce of 350 which made nearly one million garments a year, principally denim overalls for industrial purposes. In 1970 the firm began production of Wildcat jeans. By 1980 it had 700 employees but a declining order book resulted in the closure of its Bal-dovie Industrial Estate cutting factory, and operations moved to its main factory at Carolina Port, Dundee. It was forced into liquidation soon after that.

**vii.** Perhaps the inward-locating company most associated with Dundee in recent times is *Timex*, the American watch-making company. Timex, then the Time Corporation of America, began its links with Dundee in December 1946 as UK Time Limited with just eight women on its watch assembly line, selected to train others. By the 1950s Timex had a workforce exceeding 2,500, by the 1960s over 3,000 and around 6,000 at its peak in 1969. Over these years Timex produced many innovative styles of watch, as well as the Polaroid Swinger instant camera, the Clive Sinclair-designed ZX Spectrum computer and the Nimslo 3-D camera. It is a company known equally for poor relations, however, and after a prolonged and acrimonious strike in 1993, the company closed its remaining factory in Dundee.

**viii.** *Holo-Krome Ltd*, a subsidiary of the Holo-Krome Screw Corporation of Hartford, Connecticut, came to Dundee in 1954 to make high-precision, high tensile socket screws. It moved to a new site in King's Cross Road in 1957, and then to a major new factory at Kingsway West industrial estate in 1964. Extensions to this factory were opened in 1967 and 1970. Throughout much of this period, Holo-Krome was the UK's largest manufacturer of socket screws, boasting a screw catalogue containing 3,500 different items. It had 160 employees in 1987 and around 140 in 1990.

**ix.** *Ferranti Ltd*, the English precision engineering firm, set up in Dundee in 1953, when a start-up workforce of 40 technicians began producing transmit-receive cells for marine radar sets and cold cathode diodes for submarine cables on a factory site leased from the Scottish Industrial Estate Corporation. It opened a new Dundee factory in 1965 by which time its workforce of 650 was contributing to the technology used in Concorde. By 1981 it was making microwave components and electrical connection systems, transformers and military and industrial lasers.

**x.** *Levis Straus*, the American jean manufacturers, set up in 1972 in Dundee



operating from a factory on Dunsinane Industrial Estate and a cutting plant at the Baldovan Industrial Estate. In 1982 it moved to a 60,000 sq ft production factory at Dunsinane Avenue, on the city's north-west perimeter. Employment levels rose steadily, from around 250 in the 1970s to around 500 today.

At the time of writing there has never been a published history of 20th century Dundee and no empirical analysis of the impact these new employers and industries (and others) is known. Some general observations can be made, however. Firstly the incoming industries, along with other incoming and indigenous concerns, formed a watershed in the industrial development of the city by creating a considerable electronics and light engineering sector. For example, the 1931 Census included no separate occupational listing for the manufacture of office machinery for Dundee, while the 1961 entry revealed that 41% of those employed in the engineering and white goods sector were involved in the manufacture of office machinery, compared to only 6% for Scotland as a whole, 3% for Glasgow, 2% for Edinburgh and 1% in Aberdeen. In 1911, the textile workforce was 48% - or nearly half of all those in work in Dundee. By 1961 only 18% remained in this once-dominant sector.

Adding to the industrial transformation taking place in Dundee, it was no coincidence that the arrival and establishment of new electronics and service companies in the post-Second World War period witnessed a movement of thousands of jobs out of the city centre and into peripheral industrial estates. The jute heyday, by contrast, had served to drive women into the city centre from Dundee's rural hinterland.

**Table Four:** Employment in factories in industrial estates in Dundee.

<b>1948</b>	<b>1,075</b>
<b>1952</b>	<b>3,918</b>
<b>1960</b>	<b>7,007</b>
<b>1966</b>	<b>11,407</b>

Source: Carstairs, 1968, p336

With the 1966 sample Census figure taking the distribution of jobs into industrial estates to 12% of Dundee's total occupied workforce, the mass unemployment of the pre-war jute industry was largely overcome. Dundee Labour Party estimated enthusiastically in 1947 (Electoral Pictorial No 1, Nov 1947) "that by 1950 every able-bodied person in Dundee will be in employment." And, by 1952, town planners could write:

"So successful has been the selection and development of these new industries that, in complete contrast to the inter-war period, there have actually been signs of a shortage of Labour."

(City and Royal Burgh Advisory Plan Report, 1952, p34)

That Dundee's pool of labour showed themselves to be exceptionally well-suited and adeptly skilled to meet the challenges of the electronics age is a second key point. Burndept Ltd, for example, published details of its early days in Dundee in the *Evening Telegraph*:

"It was mostly Dundee sweat and skill that hammered and heated the precious rubbish until it began to take shape again. Only six key workers came up from the south to advise and direct their labours. By the end of 1943, the miracle was complete. Burndept Ltd - of Dundee now - were producing batteries again. "

(Evening Telegraph 10.5.1947)

When Stanley Allyn, president of the National Cash Register Company (NCR) visited Scotland in 1950, he said of the Dundee workforce, "Production is good. Efficiency and morale excellent. Why? Because Scots people are industrious and conscientious" (PJ 19.8.1950). In 1968, Mr R. Boyd, Veeder-Root's director of manufacturing, said his company was "more than satisfied" with the type of employee it had found in the city. "They had an inherent ability to learn the new techniques" (DC 14.8.1968). One of the factors which influenced L.S. Meyer's choice of Dundee for their new clock-making venture in 1946 was the belief that "suitable labour would be available" - and the results proved that

this confidence was justified. "The operators have proved themselves to be dextrous, efficient and adaptable, adjusting themselves from their former types of work to up-to-date clock manufacture and assembly." (Statement by Meyer directors, *People's Journal*, undated cutting 1946). 1.

Ferranti, writing of their role in Dundee in 1958, said, "Since the firm came to Dundee four years ago they have been more than satisfied with the quality of the labour available in the city" (ET 30.12.58). In 1957 Timex issued a statement which said: "In the Dundee area, Timex has found a pool of intelligent readily-trained people who have adapted themselves to this specialised industry with excellent results" (*A Hundred Years of Watchmaking*, 1957, p2). When he opened a new Ferranti factory in 1964, Mr Michael Noble, the Secretary of State for Scotland, said, "Labour availability in Dundee is good. Men and women have shown adaptability and intelligence" (DC 29.8.1964). And, according to the *Daily Express* in 1979, the workers at Levi's - 80% of them women - were voted the company's best workers "in the world" (13.4.1979).

Carstairs (1968, p328) makes the assertion in the *Statistical Account of Scotland* that the "vast majority" of those working in the new industries after the Second World War were men. He also stated (ibid) that "the great dependance of Dundee on the employment of women and girls had practically disappeared by 1961." This study argues that this was not the case.

Statistically, for example, the ratio of females in employment in Dundee fell only from 44% in 1911 to just under 40% in 1961, (Census of Scotland, 1911 and 1961). The proportion of the adult male population in gainful employment in Dundee actually fell between 1931 and 1951, from 91.4% to 88.3%, the latter figure below the Scottish average of 90.3% (Census of Scotland, 1951).

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1. What made this episode in the transition of Dundee's skills base so remarkable was that Meyer's labour skills had to be built up from virtual scratch as no factories of this type had existed in Britain in pre-war days. Clock manufacturing on a large scale was alien in this country and popularly priced clocks were imported, some eight million annually in 1946.

As will be shown below, what occurred was a movement of Dundee women into new and incoming industries, as well as, to a lesser extent, growth in occupations such as banking, education, commerce, professional services and public finance. This, together with the decline of jute employment, meant there were far fewer women and girls in the city's staple industry though their numbers remained comparatively significant (eg, 70% of Dundee's working women and girls in textiles in 1911, 22% in 1961).

Moreover, this study claims that the seamless transition to the electronics industry reflected in the statements above was made possible only through the presence of a women workforce. Of Burndept's workforce of 550 in 1947, for example, 450 were women. William Robertson, who worked for Burndept, later Vidor, between 1942 and 1957, recalled that his department at Burndept had two men and up to 50 women in the early 1950s. "The numbers of women in the factory was always a factor," he recalled (interviewed 13.2.99). "I was a foreman. In our production room there would be myself and one other male, and perhaps as many as 40 to 50 women making cardboard cladding for batteries. What we called the X-shift, the shift which came on between 6pm and 10pm for normal wage rates, was entirely female."

Virtually all of NCR's workforce in 1946-47 was recruited locally and half of them were women. Over 600 of Veeder-Root's workforce of 1,000 were women. Commenting on Ferranti's prospective workforce in 1953, *The Courier* (14.8.1953) said that of the 350 employees, two thirds would be women. Between 1943 and 1951, nearly 300 women were employed to work at sewing machines and electronic cutters at Hamilton Carhartt's original factory in Lochee Road, which had a total workforce of under 400. *The People's Journal* (7.6.1947) reported couthily, "It's Dundee lassies who make these overalls - not mechanical wheels or levers." By the 1970s, 400 of Levi's 450 employees were women and Timex employed 3,000 women in Dundee when there were only 2,500 women remaining in the jute industry (DC 13.10.1977).

The new sector was also being kick-started by women who had spent a lifetime in the jute mills.

Mrs Joyce Royle, a mother of three boys, from Balmarino Place in Dundee, rose to become convener of Timex shop stewards, and thus one of the most influential female figures in Scottish industry. Interviewed in February 1997, then aged 65, she recalled that it was quite normal for jute workers to enter Dundee's emerging industries. She had entered Cox Brothers' jute mill at 14 in 1946, the year Timex moved to Dundee. The eventual decline in jute meant she had to seek new directions. She worked briefly for another American newcomer, Veeder-Root, then ICI, before, at the age of 32, joining the customer services department at the Milton of Craigie Timex factory. 1. *The Crucial Issue*, an article in Dundee Chamber of Commerce's Journal in 1969 noted (p593): "It is important to remember that new techniques and changes in domestic fashion are affecting the older industries. Many of the textile workers have moved into new fields of activity."

Of the 300-strong female workforce at Hamilton Carhartt Ltd, the *People's Journal* commented, "Less than five per cent of the firm's local labour force had previous experience as machinists" (PJ 7.6.1947). The arrival of Timex in the city also marked a change for Dundee's female-dominated labour market. "Before the war, jute textiles dominated the city's economy. For women this change was particularly important as light engineering replaced textiles as the principal employer" (*Once Upon a Timex*, Jan 1997).

That the jobs were earned and not given to the women as a matter of right is also evident. The intricate nature of battery assembly, for instance, required

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1. It is interesting to note that at first her parents were suspicious of this move. "They did not trust the American company. They thought I might end up a Mormon, or something, and leave Dundee. It was not until I went back and told them about the good conditions in the factory and especially the pensions they were arranging for women workers that they changed their minds."

dexterity, patience, and a keen eye. Scottish author Jack House visited NCR in 1949 and observed its production line. House commented: "A girl sat putting the twenty-one finicky wee bits together ... I was amazed at the intricacy of the work. Apparently Dundee people are very good at this sort of thing, perhaps because jute work on which most of the inhabitants were employed at one time can be a finicky thing" (NCR *Factory Post*, No 2, Feb 1949). The incoming workforce in the Timex watchmaking plant in 1946-47 was almost entirely female and it was said publicly at the time that women were a major factor in the company locating in Dundee:

"The corporation was recommended by the Board of Trade and Ministry of Labour to go out into the post-war development areas. Try South Waes, they were advised, or Belfast, or Newcastle, or Glasgow or Dundee. They totted up the pluses and minuses of each place visited. Dundee had the female labour to offer. Watchmaking's a finicky business. It brings out the best in the ladies - their dogged determination, their dainty dexterity. The firm planned a staff that was 75 per cent female."

(*A Watchful Eye for a Slice of Pie*, Courier, 12.11.47)

"Women and girls have proved themselves most adaptable and capable," said Ferranti of its workforce in 1958 (ET 30.12.1958). At Burndept in the early 1950s, the manufacture of dry batteries employed several hundreds - mainly women. "In the early days of production, women were found to be more adaptable than men in this particular type of work" (Dundee *Survey & Plan*, 1952, p125). John Campbell, who started at Timex in 1954 and who rose to become Quality Control Manager, recalled in 1997, "A lot of women came from the jute works and they ate up the work in Timex." David Lindsay, who began at Timex in 1960, and who became an Inspector on the production line, said, "Men couldn't compete with women on the machines. They told me that they had automatic machines in America that could not match the women" (both extracts from *Once Upon A Timex*, 1997). In 1947 Mr John Strachey of the Timex parent company told the *Glasgow Herald* that the "girls employed in

his Scottish Timex factory” were considered at least equal in skill and aptitude to the third generation of American workers - “operatives that is whose parents and grandparents had been employed in the firm’s American factories. I consider this a very high tribute” (GH 6.5.1947). Tributes to the women’s skills were also made by the firm’s American directors in *The Courier* on September 20, 1949 and June 24, 1952, by which time there were 400 women employed by Timex in the city ... “The girls with nimble fingers on assembly are really the people who count. In over ten different stages, sitting under powerful lamps with tweezers and magnifying glasses, they pick up minute parts, place them in the correct positions, and inside an hour a watch all but case is ticking in a testing room at the other side of the factory.” 1.

Joyce Royle also recalled the skills of the Dundee women in the new industries: “When Timex opened, all the women were former jute workers. They were very nimble, good with their hands, and had very good eyesight. 2. But the women were definitely versatile: remember they quickly adapted from producing watches, to producing cameras then computers.” William Robertson, who worked in Burndept for 15 years, recalled when interviewed in 1998, “What the women did was quite incredible. They would be sitting using hand guillottes to chop cardboard, before slipping it into the set. They would be doing it so quickly that I could hardly follow what they were doing, but at the same time they were reading their papers, or the *My Weekly* or whatever. I tried to do their job once. I didn’t have the patience for it. Men don’t have the temperament to do the same operation hour after hour, day after day. But these women did in Vidor.”

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1. One of the achievements of the Dundee women that year was the successful production of a watch hairspring. During the war, the Swiss were the only people in Europe who could make them. By 1952, the Dundee women were producing 4,000 a day and working on nearly 50 different types of watch.

2. Although there was legislation to prevent deafness in jute mills, the piece parts undertaken by Dundee women in the watch factories allegedly affected the eyesight of many of them. No research has been seen on this.

In 1958, Dundee Chamber of Commerce could sum up:

“The war factories were uniformly successful. The advantages of work here were early discovered; in particular the unit of individual production was high, especially where women were employed.”  
(Journal, March 1958, p35)

There was also a feel-good factor in Dundee caused, surprisingly, by a shortage of labour during the late-1940s, 1950s and 1960s - the most most notable change being the vastly improved economic conditions as compared with the pre-war years. The Town Council's planning advisory report in 1952 noted, (p10) “Whereas in pre-war years there was heavy unemployment in the City, the position now is, broadly speaking, one of full employment with industry providing improved working conditions, canteens and social services.” *The Crucial Issue*, an article in Dundee Chamber of Commerce's *Journal* in 1969 said (p593): “The fact that the Department of Employment and Productivity has 700 employment vacancies on its books in Dundee alone speaks for itself.” Ironically, such was the expansion in the electronics sector in Dundee that it had a deleterious effect on the once-dominant jute industry. In 1965, reported the *Dundee Directory* (1966, p18), the textile workforce of 17,500 “could have been raised by several hundred had suitable workers been available.” It further noted that the labour shortage had led to considerable under-manning, especially in spinning and winding departments, where women workers were traditionally prominent.

It is clear, then, that Dundee's employment position changed radically in the first half of the 20th century. From a position where around 50% of the workforce was employed in a single industry in 1911, by the mid-1960s the numbers in jute had fallen away during contraction to around 12%, while other industrial sectors were showing higher percentages of workers, notably the electronics sector.



A sample Census of Scotland, published in 1966, indicated the diversity of types of employment.

**Table Five:** Total employees, Dundee, 1966

<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>50,970</b>	<b>38,350</b>

Source: Sample Census for Scotland, 1966

**Table Six:** Employment by six selected areas of workplace, Dundee, 1966

	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>Food, drink &amp; tobacco</b>	<b>1,450</b>	<b>1,640</b>
<b>Engineering &amp; Electrical goods</b>	<b>7,850</b>	<b>4,640</b>
<b>Textiles</b>	<b>8,310</b>	<b>7,400</b>
<b>Paper, printing &amp; publishing</b>	<b>2,130</b>	<b>1,440</b>
<b>Distributive Trades</b>	<b>5,840</b>	<b>7,780</b>
<b>Professional &amp; scientific services</b>	<b>3,490</b>	<b>7,330</b>

Source: Sample Census for Scotland, 1966

Table 5 shows that it was still the case that women workers formed a large percentage of the workforce in Dundee. In 1966 42.9% of the total occupied workforce was female, compared to 45.6% in 1881 and 43.7% in 1911 - which conflicts with Carstairs' view in the *Statistical Account*. What changed was that other cities in Scotland were catching up in terms of female employment. The decline in textiles is telling, however. Some 7,400 females are noted for 1966, barely a third of the 1921 and 1931 equivalent totals. Watches and clocks (listed within the Engineering & Electrical goods section), indicate the impact of the likes of Timex, with 860 male employees and 1,920 females.

Thus a picture can be painted in post-war Dundee of a largely-female workforce laying down its textile apron and donning factory overalls; of a move from city centre mill to industrial estate and from spinning frame to circuit board assembly, and from fleeting to full employment. The *Dundee Directory*

charted some of this impressive development:

\* of 1966 it reported that unemployment was just 2% and said, "Though there has been no influx of new industries to the city for a number of years, this has been more than compensated for by the steady, and often large-scale expansion carried out by the established firms."

\* of 1967 it reported unemployment in Dundee at 2.7% compared to the Scottish average of 3.9% and said, "Throughout the year there was a persistent shortage of skilled labour."

\* of 1968 it said "some 24 proposals for new industrial buildings or extensions to existing ones were approved by the town's planning department."

\* and 1969 "was a year of continued expansion in the industrial field" and one in which "employment officers had been striving to fill a steady and substantial flow of vacancies."

Rounding off the transition, the *Directory* (1969, p19) was able to point out with considerable pride that, by 1968, Dundee's engineering sector enjoyed a larger workforce than the total employment in textiles. This was, indeed, a great watershed and milestone in the city's industrial story and it was partly the result of the large-scale and successful movement of working women.

### **Industrial relations**

While traditionally it might be expected in times of full employment for the prospect of industrial action to be heightened, the women of Dundee must have been quite bemused at such a workplace transition given the city's troubled industrial history. Many transferring from textiles to incoming industries in Dundee entered a brave new world. Quite possibly they came from a factory that had been their family's sole source of income for several generations. They may have started off as a half-timer and turned full-time at the age of 14, had a child at 16 and continued to work on through marriage and beyond. They would have known nothing but dusty jute and the clacking of shuttles in

the spinning mills. It is difficult now to imagine the impact and attraction of brand new, spacious, well-lit factories on airy industrial estates, and new opportunities in electronics and light engineering to women who had known only the mentality of the mill. Furthermore, housing estates were being built on peripheral sites at this time, alleviating the utterly miserable slum conditions found in the city centre by Dundee Social Union in 1905. Thus many workers' domestic environment had undergone dramatic change. The incoming companies helped to propound this industrial miracle by introducing new procedures which must have appeared radical in Dundee. For example, Hamilton Carthartt established a three-year course in pattern-making and dress-making at Dundee College of Art in September 1947. There were 85 women volunteers in the first uptake. The firms also launched training schemes within their factories.

Given the history and record of industrial relations in Dundee prior to the Second World War 1. there was no reason to assume that the city's incoming and new industries could expect strike-free production or shopfloors devoid of militancy. The opposite appears to the case, however. Available archives suggest relatively harmonious industrial relations between workers and management, certainly as far as incoming companies are concerned. All-out strikes, as frequently seen in the mono-industrial jute heyday, were virtually unheard of between the 1940s and the mid-1960s, and even Timex, despite its colourful record for stoppages and disruption, and the confrontational image it conjures up for many today, never witnessed an all-out strike for some 28 years after its arrival in the city. It is of interest and significance to examine why this should be the case.

Firstly, it is possible that the large numbers of workers who moved from drab, Victorian inner-city mills and factories to purpose-built, facility-filled factories

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1. The major Dockers' strike which led to riots in 1911/12 and the devastating jute dispute of 1923, for example.

on greenfield sites were, to an extent, “subdued” by the novelty of their surroundings. For example, the Burndept factory was air conditioned and the women there worked a 44-hour hour, five-day week, instead of the 48-hours (and often more) and Saturday mornings worked in textile mills. They had subsidised meals from a non-profit making canteen run by the themselves. They had half-hour “music-while-you-work” spells mornings and afternoons. The staff had their own personnel welfare office and three nurses. When Hamilton Carhartt moved to Dundee in 1942 it announced an eight-to-six, five-day week and organised an employer-subsidised canteen. Two staff outings were arranged per year, as well as two staff dances. The women were given the opportunity of putting aside “a shilling or two weekly” for these red letter days. By 1964 Ferranti in Dundee had “a spacious cafeteria for factory and office staff, white-tiled washrooms, individual clothes lockers and a first-aid room of hospital standard” (DC 28.8.1964). Conditions such as these were largely unheard of in the jute spinning mills - although they were by no means sweat shops latterly - and this partly contributed to a feeling of well-being, even pride, among women electronics employees, to the extent that, according to testimonies in this chapter, they quickly regarded themselves as the city’s “professional elite.”

Secondly, wages in these developing industries appear to have been proportionately higher than those available in the jute industry. Burndept, for example, had an incentive bonus system which gave “a 21-year-old woman the opportunity to earn between £3 2s 6d and £5 a week.” The average wage was just under £4 in Burndept at this time, a considerable amount for a woman in post-war Scotland. Pay at Hamilton Carthartt was around £3.15s a week in 1947 at the time when production targets were met. By June 1952, the average adult female worker in Timex earned £5.17s for a 44-hour week (AEU internal letter, 19.6.1952). By comparison, at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 adult males in jute “received the lowest legal minimum paid in Britain” - a figure around 40 shillings a week (Walker, 1979, p95).

And thirdly, Banks (1993) and Pugh (1992) have identified a complacency among women's groups at this time.

Unsurprisingly, the trade unions were extremely keen to make inroads into female employment in the new industries. In a letter to the then AEU president Jack Tanner, the Dundee branch secretary revealed on-going discussions within the TUC "in an endeavour to arrive at an arrangement whereby the four Unions concerned (in the Dundee engineering and electronics sector) would avoid difficulties between themselves regarding the organisation of women" (4.8.1943). The three largest unions involved, the AEU, the Transport & General Workers Union and the National Union of General Municipal Workers, later pledged to "assist each other in getting 100% organisation of women in every establishment where they were jointly concerned" (letter, 26.7.1943). A letter by the AEU divisional organiser to L.S. Meyer Ltd, NCR, UK Time Co (Timex) and Veeder-Root Ltd (4.2.1952) revealed that there had been "protracted negotiations" on women's wages in the engineering industry.

The records of the Amalamated Engineering Union make it clear, however, that its objective was to fill Dundee's emerging industrial estates with male employees. An AEU note (24.8.1945) forecast "500-1500 mainly men, mainly skilled" for the 40-acre Kingsway site, earmarked for Timex and NCR among others. In a letter three years later to the council-led Industrial Development Committee (30.3.1948), which argued for increased union recognition on the committee, the district secretary wrote: "The AEU have had representatives on the New Industries Committee from its inception and it was the reason, through the Board of Trade, of bringing work for men to the city, when mostly the work asked for was for women." <sup>1</sup>

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**1. Martin Pugh (1991, p6) has pointed out that women who supposedly underwent a dramatic liberation during the 1914-1918 war "had to be 'liberated' all over again in 1939."**

Union recruitment continued as the years passed and on occasion a competitive edge resurfaces in the minutes with complaints over the poaching of members. In March and April 1955 mass meetings of women involved in the new industries took place in Mathers Hotel, Dundee, in a public attempt to encourage union participation. Prior to the first meeting, the district branch of the AEU issued a leaflet encouraging the women workers to attend. It began: *"Women members. Are you interested in yourself? If so your wages and conditions must be of concern to you."* The emphasis of the collaboration was on wages and conditions and a sub-committee of women representing the two NCR factories, the two Timex factories, Burndept and Astral was formed. Around 70 members resolved to make a claim that the minimum rate of wages for all adult women in the industry be increased so that they should not receive "less than the adult male labourers in the industry." Although this was part of a national campaign among working women for pay parity, the Dundee managers turned them down (letter to the AEU general secretary 21.4.55).

Efforts were made in 1955 to enlarge the women's committee and in December that year it was decided that it would be composed of 10 women from each factory. Discussions took place on a range of subjects, including women's wage claims, equitable rates for the job and unity in the factories. But overall, the women's committees, which also included individual factory committees, 1. appear to have helped to instil restraint in the workplace as there is scant evidence of stoppages at this time.

The records of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, which emerged as the sole trade union representative for the largest new concerns, show that grievances gradually gained a higher profile in the electronics sector in Dundee, not only through efforts to gain equity in pay, but also in access to the wider political domain. Early in 1954, for instance, the Dundee branch was invited to cont

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1. For example, a general purposes committee of 12 was formed in the Burndept factory in the late 1940s and met once a month.

tribute to the expenses of staging the National Association of Women conference in Glasgow. The branch agreed, contributed £2, and suggested sending a union delegate from Dundee, Jessie MacKenzie (a shop steward at NCR), to represent the AEU at the meeting. A letter from the NAW (10.2.1955) confirmed this arrangement. Shortly after the meeting, which involved 360 NAW groups at the Cosmo Cinema in Rose Street, Glasgow, the national executive of the AEU wrote to the Dundee branch expressing its “disapproval” of a member attending a meeting of the National Association of Women. The Dundee branch bravely stood up for its undertaking to the women. But when it complained about the executive council’s expression of disapproval, the AEU general secretary wrote to the district secretary in Dundee (12.5.1955) pointing out that the National Association of Women had been among a list of “proscribed” organisations released by the Labour Party earlier that year:

“Every candidate on admission to the Union signs on the Proposal Form a statement which binds him or her to accept the Rules and Constitution of the Union. Part of the Constitution of the Union is affiliation to the Labour Party and obviously this carries with it the responsibility of accepting the decisions of the National Labour Party Executive proscribing certain organisations.”

The Dundee branch did not let the matter rest, and it can be assumed that the women’s persistence played a part in this. The district secretary wrote to the Union’s general secretary pointing out that **only** by paying the union’s Political Levy was a member tied to Labour Party regulations. It further argued that it was the Labour Party and not the AEU that had proscribed NAW. Indeed, he noted boldly that the Dundee branch was “opposed” to proscription of the women’s organisation. The branch appealed to the AEU’s highest decision-making appeal executive, the Final Appeal Board. But, in November 1954, the board dismissed the Dundee appeal (letter from AEU 4.11.55). <sup>1</sup>

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**1. Ironically, the AEU in Dundee had a political sub-committee whose remit was to remind members to “carry their activities into the Ward Committees by becoming individual members of the Labour Party” (Letter book, 25.4.1961).**

The women's growing presence in the industry workplace led the local district branch of the AEU for one, albeit guided by national principles, to engage in much soul searching as to what roles women should engage in the Dundee factories. In this it was possibly mindful of women's experiences in war-work, where they felt that some male workplace erosion had taken place. In January 1961, the district committee rounded on the management of Morphy Richards for "taking off a job four men and replacing them by women." The job in question had changed slightly, allowing the factory management to use cheaper skills of the women, but they had retained the men on it while the women were trained. Conversely, we find that women in the Gourdie (Timex) factory stopping work "protesting at being requested to do men's work" (letter book, 28.2. 1961). As this dispute continued, the firm issued a statement saying that it would "continue to employ females and youths in all sections of their establishments (letter, 7.3.1961). A week later, however, the AEU welcomed a report from the Divisional Organiser stating that "along with the District Secretary and Shop Steward he attended at Works Conference with it being agreed this work was male work and the women had been removed from the job" (21.3.1961).

In June 1961 the AEU district committee was told by the male operatives at Burndept that a slitting machine on the shop floor "should be operated by a male instead of a female" (13.6.1961). The women had done the job for nine months. Former Timex worker Abigail Robertson recalled (*On the Line*, 1996), "Of course in those days (1970s) women weren't allowed to go into the auto shop, (or) into the tool room." Moreover, there were several complaints about "male" managers, usually involving alleged harrassment of some form, something which mirrored events in the jute industry to an extent. In September 1965 about 80 women in the field repair depot at Timex walked out as a protest against the conduct of their department manager. The Amalgamated Engineering Union branch secretary was told - "the complaint of our members, mostly women, was that the Department Manager was frequently in the



Department checking up on the targets and that his attitude to the women was bullying" (letter, 14.9.1965).

### **Political dimension**

It was not a straightforward matter for either unions or political parties to maintain numbers in post-war Dundee, which was probably typical of elsewhere at this time. The rapid movement of the population to peripheral estates, combined to the transformation of traditional workplaces, presumably encroached upon union and party business. For example, throughout the 1950s, as the local trade union membership declined gradually, the blame was placed firmly on the difficulty of collecting party dues from the scattered flock, and seldom on any political explanation. The 1958 Dundee Labour Party report concluded: "In some cases the collector is the only link between the individual member and the ward committee" (1958, p3).

Labour and women's politics were intertwined at this time. Overall in Dundee, on the other hand, women outnumbered men as individual members in the Labour Party in 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1957 and 1960 (Dundee City Labour Party Reports, 1952-60).

During this period, DCLP was split into two constituencies, Dundee East with four Ward committees, and Dundee West (with a much larger working population) with six committees. As a rule during the 1950s, Dundee West had around twice as many members as Dundee East, an average of around 600 to 800. Women were extremely well represented in all wards, however.

In a letter to the city Labour Party district chairman in December 1954, a Ward committee chairman gave the following gender breakdown which shows a majority of women members in all but one ward. Despite this, no woman in Dundee was adopted as a parliamentary Labour candidate during the period,

while few gained selection to contest a local government seat.

**Table Seven: Members of Dundee Labour Party, December 1956. 1.**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Wards 1 &amp; 4</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Wards 2 &amp; 9</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Ward 3</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>440</b>
<b>Ward 5</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Ward 6</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Ward 7</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Ward 8</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Wards 10 &amp; 11</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Ward 12</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>161</b>

Source: Lamb Collection, DTC 2223

The annual reports of Dundee City Labour Party (DCLP) whose membership ranged between 2,000 and 3,000 at this time, feature the work of a Women's Central Committee which held meetings every month. By 1954 there were nine women's sections in Labour Party branches throughout the city, co-ordinated by the women's committee, and this rose to ten in 1956. The following year the party's district chairman wrote that the committee had "helped considerably during the Parliamentary election," (1955, p3) and that year the women held a protest meeting against the rising cost of living and manned a table in City Square, Dundee, for the collection of a petition.

It appears that the women's work was concerned with many of the women's issues that we find today and expressed by groups such as the Fawcett Society (August 1996) and the Women's Communication Centre (March 1997) - namely, childcare, domestic violence, part-time workers' rights, low and equal

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1. The City Labour Party benefited from affiliated members which boosted its voting strength and credibility. For example, affiliated membership in 1955 totalled 13,081, while the total for individual membership was 2,353 (women, 1,232, men 1,121). That year affiliated membership was drawn "from 54 trade unions, the Co-operative Party and the Fabian Society" (DCLP annual report, 1955, p3).

pay, support for carers and pensions. 1. In 1952, the Women's Central Committee also discussed divorce reform and town council elections and "staged a protest meeting against the rising cost of living" (1952, p4). In 1956 the women suggested that "tags indicating the quality of coal should be attached to all coal bags," but subsequent reports do not make clear whether this eventually-achieved goal was down to the women's endeavours. Jeannie Spence, the committee's secretary in 1957, commented:

"We have played our part in many of the activities of the Labour Party in Dundee. On the campaign against the Rents Act, our women took a prominent part in securing signatures for the petition to repeal the Bill, taking our place along with men members on the booth at City Square."

What must be borne in mind, however, is that Dundee was still a town of workers, and a Labour Party membership of 2,000 to 3,000 pales into considerable insignificance against a voting power of some 50,000 to 60,000 Labour supporters. And clearly not all women were prepared to engage the new union as well as the Labour Party. A letter to J. Ramsay, AEU shop steward, at UK Time's Milton of Craigie factory (11.6.1952) from a Brother Ramsay indicates that some women may have been apathetic to union participation, an accusation which surfaced time and time again in the early days of the Rev Henry Williamson's Mill & Factory Operatives Union in the 1880s. "There are a large number of women well in arrears and all are members of No 9 branch. Since Sister Madden packed up, we can't get a woman to take over the shop steward's job. Their arrears are far more than what they should be, and we don't know if they should rejoin or if they have to pay up. Seems a woman in Veeder-Root was in the same fix and was allowed to rejoin and came into benefit right away."

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1. By 1960 it appears that the Women's Central Committee was well established and it gained recognition that year - for its good housekeeping skills - the party chairman in Dundee commenting, "Although starting the year with a very good bank balance, we met heavy unexpected expenditure in the local elections and never really recovered from this set back. Fortunately, with the help of the Women's Section and other donations our finances were on a more sound basis by the end of the year" (1960, pp3-4).

In the 1960s Joyce Royle was a member of the Labour Party and an official in the Amalgamated Engineering Union. She became an AEU shop steward in 1969 and convener of the union membership in the giant Timex Camperdown factory two years later - something of a rarity. She recalled that when 5,200 Timex workers walked out on strike over low wages in March 1974, it was the first time men and women had united in an all-out strike in the 28 years of the company's existence in Dundee. Thus, despite the Timex reputation for disruptive workplace action, it was in fact nearly 30 years after the firm's arrival in Dundee that a serious breakdown in industrial relations took place. Joyce Royle attracted national headlines by being named strike committee leader. She recalled when interviewed in 1998 that it was the women who formed the backbone of the stoppage. "I made my debut as a speaker in City Square. It was still very unusual for women to make speeches, in Dundee at least." Of the 5,000 striking employees, representing the firm's entire hourly-paid payroll, more than half were women, she recalled. At a meeting on March 12, 1974, a two-thirds majority voted in favour of a resumption of work to avoid a permanent closure of the factory. Joyce recalled that it was an explosive situation as workers were determined to win a wage rise. 1.

Margaret Geddes Veitch was born in 1926 and entered Baxter's jute mill at the age of 14. Mrs Veitch remained with Baxter & Co as a weaver until she was aged 21. She then moved to Scott's Mill in Mid Wynd. When she was made redundant in 1969 she went to Timex. She retired from Timex in 1983, the year a long-running industrial dispute in which she was involved led to the closure of the company's Milton of Craigie plant. Mrs Veitch, although deaf - "one of the legacies of the loom" - recalled in 1995, "Women certainly started strikes in Timex. Women were different. We had to be hard, but just so we

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1. The *Courier* (16.3.1974) appears to confirm the strikers' belligerence by stating that Joyce Royle believed that there was a clear indication from members to reject the management's offer and that the strike committee had accepted the instruction of the national executive "with reluctance."

couldn't let people get away with things. We were known as Yellowcoats. We were all in the Union and all militant. Sudden strikes were common and it was often for gross unfairness. They (the management) would make ridiculous offers, and knew we would not accept them. We were weavers to trade. We worked harder than men. We never thought of ourselves unequal to a man. We were equal in opinion, equal in talking. When this equality thing came in, we did not know what it was about. We had been equal for years."

It is useful to compare the experiences of Joyce Royle and Margaret Veitch. Both had parents in the jute industry and appear to have been politicised from an early age, and citing their parents as a key influence. Joyce Royle, who became convener of shop stewards at Timex Camperdown, described her upbringing as "fairly typical." She was "political" because her household was political. She had Lochee Irish roots - her mother was Irish and the family grew up in the shadow of Cox's works, the largest jute factory in the world. Her father was laid off from the jute industry and her mother went out to work in the same factory because it was cheaper to pay women - hence the infamous "kettle boilers" nickname attributed to Dundee's jobless men. "We had money, then we didn't. One day you felt secure, the next day your father was out of work."

Mrs Veitch's mother, Harriet Geddes (1901-1976), was a day short of her 13th birthday when she entered Baxter's a generation before Margaret. Harriet Geddes had become a founding member of the Labour Party in Dundee when the legendary figure of John Sime, leader of the Dundee & District Jute and Flax Workers' Union, came to the family house to persuade her to join. Mrs Veitch's mother subsequently spoke at meetings and, as her daughter recalled (interviewed 9.1.1995) was "keen on arbitration." She became a shop steward, rose to become chairman of the union, a member of the Trades and Labour Council in Dundee, and was awarded a BEM for a life dedicated to union work. She appeared on *Down Your Way* with Richard Dimbleby and was later

appointed a member of the consultative committee of Hydro-Electric. According to Mrs Veitch, her mother, though infirm with cancer, stood up when she heard "the Red Flag" on television, and canvassed for the Labour Party "until the day she died" aged 75, in 1976.

Both Joyce Royle and Margaret Veitch entered the jute industry from school but moved across to the American-owned incoming watch-making company, Timex. But quite a change occurred as regards women's place on the factory floor at Timex between the time of Joyce Royle in the 1970s, prior to which the huge female workforce seemed to "know its place," certainly until the watershed strike of 1974, and the combative language of Margaret Veitch and her militant Yellowcoats which referred to a period of intense industrial hostility.

It is most interesting to note Margaret Veitch's explanation for militancy - "we were weavers to trade." William Robertson recalled that there were more stoppages than strikes involving women in the 1960s. "I recall one summer when the factory (Burndept/Vidor) got pretty hot. Many of the women did a lot of soldering work which was operated by gas, so you can imagine how warm it got. One day it was so bad that the women downed tools. The management ran out and came back half an hour later with large quantities of diluting orange juice. This was passed around and the women were delighted. Next day it was two degrees hotter but nobody stopped work.

"There were more serious stoppages, though, but I recall that the women in my time at Vidor would only go out if Lily McManus said so. She was the union convener, the wife of the Lord Provost of Dundee and a Communist candidate at Lochee local elections. Rather than walk out, she would start a go-slow. This meant a go-slow on the next stage of assembly, and so on. By this method the women would not lose any wages, apart from their bonus, but the factory production would be hit. The women knew all the tricks of the trade."

The women's actions cannot be seen in isolation from the times, however. In 1974, for example, there were two General Elections amid considerable unrest. A State of Emergency was declared on November 13, 1973 and, by January 2, 1974, British workers were on a three-day week. Much of the industrial action which occurred in the new industries in Dundee took place in the 1970s, when events elsewhere across the UK were symptomatic of a troubled industrial scene and one which was influenced by a global economic downturn. In 1974, for example, a wave of unofficial strikes contributed to a shortened working week in Scotland. In Glasgow, reported the *Courier* (22.10.74), "thousands of people had to walk to and from work through rubbish-strewn streets."

Worse was to come in the winter of 1978/79 as the *Courier* reported for its "strike bedevilled populace." On one day (20.1.79) the paper reported a "crippling" lorry drivers' strike, a skeleton service in the local health sector, a strike by public sector employees in Fife, including ambulancemen and school janitors and a one-day strike by ASLEF train drivers." And, as the capitalist markets sneezed in the West, so Dundee's multi-national companies caught a cold. In the early 1970s alone, the workforce in NCR Dundee fell dramatically from over 6,000 to around 1,000 (although this was due, in part, to advancing technology). Indeed, in terms of worsening industrial relations, unrest appears to have taken place for the most trivial of events. One stoppage arose in the Vidor factory in Dundee because of a perceived lack of heating:

"The district secretary reported that there had been a stoppage of work in Dept 34 due to lack of heating and the workers went home. Later other depts were affected and they requested tea. The firm stated that if tea was given, 10 mins would be deducted from the wages. This was opposed by the workers. The following day, on discovering the firm had deducted the 10 minutes, they left the factory. Too late the firm agreed not to deduct the 10 mins. A Works Conference was held. The firm agreed to pay one and a quarter hours wages at half the time lost owing to the alleged confusion."

(AEU letter book, 12.12.1961)

Ironically, the AEU district secretary also pointed out that an ex-gratia payment of 1½ hours was made the following week to the workers involved.

While Mrs Veitch was taking part in a Timex factory occupation in April 1983, there was an on-going strike at Ford's Halewood plant over the dismissal of a man for alleged vandalism, 8,000 striking steelworkers at British Steel's Rotherham plant over redundancies, 300 welders out at Cammell Laird's Birkenhead shipyard, 2,300 workers on an eight-week strike at Tilbury Docks and a famous strike at British Leyland's Cowley factory over "washing up" time. Thus it could be claimed that most major British factories in these times were prone to industrial action of varying degrees and this is worth bearing in mind when placing Dundee's new industries into a tension-filled context more familiar to the jute trade.

## **Conclusion**

The intention of this thesis is to contribute further to our knowledge of women's role and relevance in the shaping of Dundee's political history. This chapter has attempted to provide a more modern flavour of events by demonstrating that the decline of jute as a massive employer in Dundee did not end the city's reliance on working women. Rather, it was shown that large numbers of women transferred from textiles into the burgeoning electronics and light engineering sector which evolved rapidly in peripheral industrial estates during and after the Second World War. Today, names like Timex and NCR are synonymous with the city, where, once, it was jute barons such as the Cox and Baxter brothers.

The evidence demonstrates that this transformation came about largely because of the availability and adept skills of a large female workforce which quickly harnessed the skills required to assemble products such as watches and cash registers. By the 1960s the vast majority of these women were organ-



ised in trade unions, most of them in a “closed shop” arrangement in the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Many of the unions had female committees, and joint co-operative women’s councils also existed. These groups played an important role during this industrial revolution within the city, not least in attempting to close the differential between women’s and men’s wages, while showing a partial willingness to embrace the Labour Party.

In his study of the jute industry to 1923, William Walker suggests (1979, p46) that the mill workers were never paid enough to “coax them into respectability.” This is another departure point between old Dundee and the new, as the women in electronics were certainly proud of their status, to the extent that they regarded themselves as the city’s professional elite. Another departure between the two eras is the type of industrial action which took place. It is generally agreed (see Walker p69) that pre-union strikes and walkouts in the mills were conducted with much good humour on the part of the women and girls. Among younger, more financially independent women, a strike could take on the appearance of a holiday. Presumably many of the marches, name-calling and sing-song stoppages posed little threat to the jute owners. There was much pride at stake and, often, disputes were resolved with a timely knocking together of heads, prior to a “victory” march back to work. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, industrial disputes were more complex and took on altogether more combative and occasionally violent characteristics. Massive disruptions by industrial action occurred at Timex in 1974, 1983 and 1993, for example, and they led to acrimonious and extremely violent scenes. 1.

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1. The industrial strife at Timex in Dundee in 1993 was compared to the acrimonious scenes over union recognition at Grunwick in 1977, the national miners’ strike in 1982 and the infamous Wapping dispute in 1986. There were violent scenes, dozens of arrests and several convictions. Most major newspapers placed Dundee’s women at the heart of the dispute, principally because women formed over 300 of the 340 workforce who were sacked and later locked out by management. Prior to the dispute, however, three key female shop stewards were replaced by men, and men dominated the dispute, notably male officials of the AEU. The notion raised in this thesis that the daughters of Dundee were a defiant sisterhood manifested itself only in their determination to “man” the picket line and not give up what they considered to be a justifiable struggle. Once again, however, Dundee’s working women were largely divorced from decision making. Indeed, there exists the possibility that had women been given better access to negotiations, the firm might not have closed in August 1993.

Margaret Veitch retrospectively revels in her “women started strikes, women were different” memories, hinting that the city’s women deserve their reputation for activating disputes. Ann Caird, a former Timex worker, had a different recollection :

“There was more women (union) members than there was men. And the thing is: the women believed everything they were told because, nine times out of ten, it was a man that was telling them. It was very male orientated, the union. It is just the way Dundee is. The women tend to be the workers but they are always told what to do.”

(*On The Line*, 1996)

And so *New industries* weaved a key thread into the thesis by shifting the focus on to the present-day era. It broke new ground by recording the mass transfer of women from textiles to electronics, as jute spinning and weaving declined. It traced for the first time how the women took to new companies setting up the city after the Second World War. It examined whether patterns of the 19th century workplace corresponded to those in the following century. In particular it tested whether women who perhaps failed to capitalise politically on a dominant position in the city’s jute mills and factories, fared better in an era which coincided with electoral franchisement and advances in employment and wages legislation. It concluded that, although conditions in the workplace were better - which appeared to manifest itself in the mollification of the Dundee workforce - much inequality remained, as did continued doubts over women’s rights to social and political independence. Consequently, such factors inhibited women’s access to avenues leading to fuller and meaningful political representation.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This thesis charted political connections in the life and times of a major city to further our understanding of the relationship between feminist theory and local political participation. The questions posed in its opening chapter focused on women's access to and activity within political elites. While the thesis is mostly arranged chronologically, it noted throughout the presence of many interconnecting issues and themes, causes and effects as it determined women's level of activity in decision-making fora. It noted also that very little attention has been accorded to Scotland's fourth city within the study of politics, and virtually none within the sphere of feminist scholarship.

The broad question Chapter One addressed was: what are the factors relevant to women's participation in "politics" in Dundee and did it make them different in some radical way? In other words, what acted to draw women into politics in the city; what prevented or stalled their participation? What avenues of representation were open to them and was gender relevant? This necessarily required a definition of "politics" which took account of women's activities, values and ways of thinking, which have been conceived by some as being outside the framework of public political life.

Chapter One also asked whether the city's women shared common interests as political actors, and this was a further question considered at length as the study progressed. To this end, for example, the thesis looked for the possibility of women voting as a cohesive block in the post-suffrage period and analysed the development of female textile unions in Dundee - in the light of Eleanor Gordon's assertion (1992, p102) that "only in textiles would there have been any real potential for women to develop trade union muscle." To show that the evidence in Dundee indicated a rising incidence of community-conscious female activity prepared to challenge male definitions of what was best for both

sexes in society, it is necessary at this point recap briefly on the chapter contents and conclusions, which, together, build towards answering fundamental questions over the “difference” of Dundee women:

**Chapter One** used social and economic data to describe Dundee and to show how it evolved into a city in which it was different in the respect that it was dependent on a single industry, and how it became a staple-industry town that relied heavily on low-paid female labour. Through the use of Census statistics, it illustrated the extent to which Dundee’s women found themselves in a numerically and socially “different” position to women within the context of other Scottish cities for much of the period under study, and whether this was relevant to understanding their participation in political activity.

The chapter also introduced feminist theory using a wide range of secondary source material. It defined historical and current theoretical perspectives and debates and how the feminist agenda has applied to the wider issues of politics and political outcomes. This section built up a picture of gender-based relations of dominance based on male values and institutions before siting the city of Dundee into this complex context and determining whether feminist theory was relevant to understanding political activity in the city.

Chapter One also detailed why Dundee had been chosen as a study topic. In seeking an explanation as to how and why women have less political power than men, it examined the contention frequently held in research and popular literature that Dundee women were ‘different’ and that it was a ‘women’s town.’ It explored contemporary and current comments on the women’s “unique” characteristics to determine whether this mythologised identity is soundly based. It embarked on a search of feminist literature and Scottish women’s history to explain the ideological rationale behind such descriptions, and gradually illustrated through academic and popular statements a complex rhetoric placing the city’s working women in the centre of decision making.

**Chapter Two** examined the city's formal political history - its Liberal traditions, its swing to Labour - and charted parliamentary elections over the study period. It set out to establish whether women as women, using women's concerns, played a collective role in the changing pattern of formal political representation in Dundee, and the level of that role in shaping the city's political structure. By consulting primary and secondary-sourced material, the chapter had the objective of determining whether Dundee's unique gender characteristics facilitated access to, or in some way debarred, the city's women from representation on political elites.

Following on from a study of parliamentary party recruitment and representation, the thesis examined the votes for women campaign to explore whether militancy in the city's workplaces - which reached a height in the last two decades of the 19th century - carried over into the subsequent suffrage movement. Meeting the objective of seeking out evidence of female political activity in the city, this important section provided an answer to the question - whether support for the suffrage campaign was indigenous or "imported"? - by means of the first academic scrutiny and analysis of contemporary local suffrage records and commentaries. Another question answered was whether the push for votes was focused in Dundee on middle-class and professional women, as in other cities, or whether the city's huge population of working women played a prominent role? This important section diverged from Leah Leneman's view (1992, p93) that "working class women probably formed the bedrock of the movement in Dundee." Leneman's opinion that the "suffrage movement was not grafted onto Dundee from outside; from the beginning Dundee women were wholeheartedly committed," (ibid) was also challenged with evidence.

The conclusion of this section was that the suffrage period in Dundee was a reflection of the universalism associated with first-wave feminism and, mostly because of the prominence of WSPU activists in Dundee, the votes-for-women

question appeared an issue that should override all female differences. That the campaign was important in national terms was a separate, but no less valuable conclusion. Having said that, it never matched the working-class movement in Lancashire described by Liddington and Norris (1994, P14) where “over sixty thousand women felt so incensed about their lack of political rights that they signed the textile workers petition.”

Chapter Two then examined the subsequent election of Britain’s only Prohibitionist MP, Edwin Scrymgeour, to a Dundee seat and then, following equality in voting rights in 1929, the election of the city’s one and so-far only woman MP, Florence Horsbrugh. Here the thesis broke new ground by setting out why these unlikely electoral success may have been a result of a collective female response to winning the electoral mandate. In 1929, for example, Edwin Scrymgeour obtained his largest-ever poll of 50,000 votes. The Dundee *Courier* pointed out that the Prohibitionist poll had increased by 77% and it noted that the new electoral register had increased the number of female voters by 71%. The paper felt the “significance of the correspondence of the two figures cannot be missed” (DC 1.6. 1929).

This survey of surviving Prohibitionist Party documents indicated the telling support given to it by Dundee’s women. The records of the party, which was rooted in Dundee, introduced the notion that Dundee women exercised political power by acting as a force of moderation rather than the militancy suggested by the popular references to “a woman’s town” detailed in Chapter One. In 1920, 1923 and again in 1926, for example, women throughout the city, apparently from different classes, went to extraordinary lengths to support Edwin Scrymgeour’s drink abstention campaign. The archive was also significantly useful in demonstrating women’s concerns with welfare issues generally, notably housing matters. To the length that Dundee women may have acted cohesively as a block to ensure victory for Florence Horsbrugh two years later, it was noted that a Bill the previous year had granted equal suffrage to

men and women, increasing the number of women voters in the city by a figure greater than that of any other major city in the United Kingdom. While bearing in mind the considerable swing to the Conservatives in 1931, Horsbrugh's win in the working-class seat of Dundee, which had not returned a Conservative (Unionist) Member of Parliament in 100 years, and which had 26,000 unemployed inhabitants according to that year's Census, demanded scrutiny. That she also overturned a Labour majority of 11,000 in the process, was, the thesis concluded, related more to the expanded female electorate than to successful party policies.

In **Chapter Three** the issues of whether levels of representation were higher or hindered for women in the domain of municipal elections in Dundee were examined. This question was sited against the feminist debate over whether the vote was essentially symbolic or whether it was a gate-opening opportunity to widen women's range of domestic demands. Using broader secondary sources on women's performance in local authority elections, the chapter detailed the background of the women involved and the parties they represented and discovered significant examples of women's political impact within the municipal arena.

The numbers of women standing for election to Dundee Town Council were recorded and their success rate examined. These trends were viewed against a context where females had formed the majority among those eligible to vote in Dundee in local elections since 1918. Women were found to be "slow" to stand as candidates, and it was nearly 20 years after Scotland's first female town councillor that Lily Miller, in 1935, was elected to Dundee Town Council, when Edinburgh had two women councillors as early as 1918 (Innes, 1998, p177). The chapter illustrated an increasing trend in those women willing and being selected to stand, however, countered by a stagnation in numbers succeeding at the ballot box. Importantly the chapter was able to show that, while women's participation in municipal elections is less than equitable, there was

greater interest in local politics among women in Dundee - interestingly, across a spread of social backgrounds. However, while the evidence suggested that their presence in local government kept their political fire alive in Dundee, no noticeable leadership emerged from among the city's vast army of working women. In citing work on local authority local government representation by Jim Barry (1991), and Brown, Jones and Mackay (1999), it was possible to place Dundee's experience into the wider context of underrepresentation at local government level.

Attempts to account for women's subordination in society are "one of the significant roles of feminist theory" (Stacey, 1993, p 52). Bearing this in mind the central question posed and explored in **Chapter Four** was whether Dundee's massive and historically volatile force of working women shared common interests as political actors - or whether they were subjected to patriarchal controls which prevented access to political participation. It was useful here to determine how important gender itself was in determining whether women organised earlier, later, or in a different way from other industrial centres.

The approach to these questions in this thesis was sited against the fact that little alternative employment outside the jute trade existed for Dundee women for much of the study period, even during the wars when traditional patterns of employment were disrupted. Textile manufacturing stood out as the most powerful and most influential industry in the decades from 1870. The fact that it was an industry concentrated in a relatively small area of the city and limited to a small number of wealthy male employers, contributed to its self perpetuation at the expense - as Chapter One's economic and social statistics illustrated - of catch-up development within the city's public administration, professional or service sectors. While recognising the power of male millowners, managers and trade union officials, and witnessing therein patriarchal control as well as resistance to it, Chapter Four examined the launch of Scotland's first female trade union in the city, and the political ramifications of its



creation, such as its internal debate over whether to admit male members. 1.

An important question was whether the circumstances operating in Dundee could be applied to the debate over whether women “took a minor part in the management of most unions” with the rank and file “generally apathetic” (Roberts, 1988, p72), or whether the experiences of women’s waged labour in Dundee, and their propensity to withdraw it, is substantive evidence of the need to reappraise this perspective. William Walker (1979, p45) believed the jute millgirls to be “the major anarchic influence” in the city. But Eleanor Gordon (1991) suggested that the shop floor culture of the mill could be a “powerful force for generating networks of solidarity and mutual assistance.” The findings of this thesis were that, although major jute unions were led by men until fairly recent times, women almost without exception formed majorities on executive committees and filled senior posts such as vice-president, treasurer and secretary. Walker concluded (1979, p51) that female union “participation at official level was maintained at a high standard.” This is shown by the evidence. On the other hand, the notion of widespread participation at the highest level must be grounded in the numbers of women involved in textiles compared to the men - 80% in the spinning departments in 1911, for example (JFWU letter book, 18.2.1911).

One conclusion drawn from this chapter’s focus on the jute trade was the presence of noticeable differences between Dundee and the highly-politicised cotton industry in Lancashire, as described by Liddington & Norris (1995), from which several political leaders emerged. As to why this should be so, it was concluded that the pressures on the majority of working women in Dundee - length of the working day, conditions of work, and so on - coupled to domestic

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1. Anne Witz (1993, p271) concluded that “the growing trade union movement was hostile to working women, affording them no representation or protection.

responsibilities in less-than ideal home circumstances, prevented wider participation. Indeed, Chapter Four raised the possibility that Dundee was so heavily dependant on jute that the singularity of the textile trade acted against the development of leadership potential elsewhere in the city. In determining why this should be so, the thesis highlighted contemporary evidence which indicated, contrary to popular perception, that some female textile operatives were better placed - financially independent, for instance - to engage in and influence political activity, but 'elected' not to do so.

In looking to ascertain levels of political activity within Dundee's working environment, the thesis did not limit itself to examining only formal institutions, such as the city's trade unions. Significantly, women's propensity to take industrial action in the form of boisterous walk outs, in spite of union dictate, was a common thread running through the patchwork of industrial relations during the period studied. How far disputes were spontaneous, whether semi-formal organisational skills were adopted, and whether women leadership and support was a factor, were important questions examined in this chapter. One area explored to examine this question was an apparent ideological gulf between the Dundee Factory Operatives' Union, founded with the aim to avoid strikes almost at any cost.... "an organisation which shall be a power for the prevention of strikes and lockouts" ... and the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union, effectively a breakaway union from the other, which stated in the introduction to its constitution, "while we deplore strikes...we must be prepared for such a contingency." Perhaps significantly, the evidence showed that the antagonistic relationship which developed between the two unions meant that opportunities for co-operation - and the strength in numbers to enable them to respond to the threat of concerted action by jute barons - were lost.

A further area of inquiry was Chapter Four's ground-breaking research into the possible presence of working women's economic independence. This completely diversifies from known histories of women in the textiles industry and

the preponderance of modern claims that they were economically destitute. A key conclusion of this study, based on the contemporary evidence available, was that the theoretical notion that the economic dependence of women on men limits their political participation does not fit comfortably in the case of a city which possessed in 1905 12,000 single women households out of a total 37,000. Having said that, the evidence indicated no strong political challenge to male authority by the city's working women other than typical grievances over pay and conditions.

**Chapter Five** departed from aspects of parliamentary, local authority and female-powered shopfloor politics to address women's input into powerful local elected bodies, such as Dundee School Board and Dundee Parish Council. It revealed the presence of women in the city who shared common interests and developed them into the basis for common action. It showed that the actions of the women involved in elected organisations had a bearing on other political activity in Dundee, notably the functions of the Town Council.

Though their role in public affairs has yet to be fully researched, Chapter Five showed that elected bodies such as the School Board and Parish Council had considerable input to life in the city. The way in which these organisations dealt with gender equality and difference issues was highlighted. Some records of both organisations were available for consultation. They showed a dearth of women representatives until the turn of the century. From its creation in 1873 until 1891, for example, there were no female members of Dundee School Board and none in Dundee Educational Trust, which acted as a watchdog to raise funds for the board, and no mention in the minutes to suggest women wanted to stand for election. There were no women members of Dundee Parish Council prior to 1903, though they had been eligible to stand for three decades. However, women's political priorities and perspectives gradually became less hidden. Indeed, as far as Dundee is concerned, it could be concluded that the political "awakening" of the city's women took place within

the role and remit of these powerful elected bodies. In Scotland in 1927-28, for example, there were 184 women out of a total of 8013 Parish Council members, or 2.4% In the same year, women on Dundee Parish Council accounted for just under 13% of total membership.

It was shown through their activities that elected women made a significant difference to political structures in Dundee and to political outcomes. It was also demonstrated that the two key feminist debates - difference between women and that of universalism - were often blurred by concerted action and individual acts against oppression.

**Chapter Six** examined autonomous women's organisations and the voluntary sector to look for the emergence of sympathy and support for women's political participation. The chapter profiled, among others, the passionate pro-equality attitudes of Dundee Social Union and the Dundee branch of the Women Citizens' Association and, in more recent years, the work of the Soroptomists of Dundee - organisations which placed decision-making in female hands.

The little-known archives of community organisations such as Dundee Social Union and the Dundee Women Citizens' Association (DWCA) were examined to determine whether activity which might be defined "political" was taken on women's behalf or by women. In particular, the hitherto uninspected and unanalysed archive of the DWCA showed its members' significant contribution across a spectrum of political and welfare issues at a time when Pugh commented (1992, p124) that it was "an unescapable conclusion that by 1930 feminist politics had been decisively marginalised." 1. In showing the wide-ranging activity among female welfare reformers to improve the conditions of women generally and working women in particular, the view raised by Susan James

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1. This contrasts, for instance, with impressions taken by Cheryl Law (London, 1997) in her work, *Suffrage & Power: The Women's Movement 1918-1928*, which makes no mention of the Women Citizens' Association (London, 1997).

(1992, p51), that “the quest for citizenly equality undertaken by those who campaigned for the introduction of the ballot box has recently been dismissed as both illusory and pernicious” can be critically challenged. Rather, the Dundee evidence meets Mary Dietz’s view (1992, p20) that “only when women act as citizens, not mothers, can the policies advocated by feminists be implemented.”

The contributions by religious organisations in Dundee was also enthusiastic and far from invisible. The chapter examined the women-backed Gilfillan Church in Dundee, a socially-conscious church which became the only completely independent congregation in Scotland. Data on the Gilfillan Church provided evidence of progressive politics in Dundee, while the large Dundee Catholic population, which numbered a sizeable 14,000 in 1871 and 30,000 fifty years later, also proved worthy of examination.

These are some of the conscious-raising groups which “shaped the political themes of contemporary feminism” (Humm, 1992 p1) as much perhaps as local political parties. Identified within them were the realigning of spheres often regarded in political perspectives as dichotomous - work and family, or private and public - which remain issues of contemporary feminist debate. There was recognition too of the groups’ practical and emotional support for each other, and the creation of a networking framework in support of common cause. We saw this, for example, in the women’s joint efforts to change local laws on female police officers. Such evidence provides an indication of the breadth of the women’s movement in Dundee at this time as its network expanded. The thesis argues that in meeting many of their political objectives and laying the foundations for how local government should be shaped in years ahead, post-suffrage women’s groups should be viewed as a formidable force.

It was considered it important to examine whether women as women made a difference, or whether it is when they worked together in such organisations

in a conscious female collectivity that they had impact in political fora. Gaining the vote clearly enthused many women, for example, but did not necessarily tackle the wider forms of oppression that affected women in general. Thus non-elective female intervention in the local state was fully examined in Chapter Six and placed within the wider framework of feminist action, political activity and community policy.

**Chapter Seven** focused on the movement of thousands of women textile workers from Victorian jute factories to the progressive engineering and electronics sector in Dundee in the post-war era - a movement which led me again to question the “ideology” of female domesticity. The chapter examined workplace experiences and conditions and established important parallels between two key but palpably different chapters in Dundee’s industrial story. Thus the desire to search for events and experiences which link the past and present is met in this chapter - although it was understood that this can be fraught with difficulty of comparison and that the findings are necessarily of a general nature. First-hand accounts of this post-industrial development, however, coupled with useful primary source material, allowed a picture to be created of women’s advance in trade unionism and strike brokerage. For example, the thesis provides evidence from the jute era which indicated limited union participation and spontaneous industrial stoppages; whereas the electronics expansion coincided with “closed shop” trade union arrangements, with disputes taking on politically complex, combative characteristics.

The significance of the research in this chapter was multi-levelled. It also filled a void in that no comprehensive history of 20th century Dundee exists, and none that charts jute’s decline and the progress of incoming “women-friendly” multinationals. The analysis of this important watershed in the city’s industrial history adds a major new dimension to women’s history in post-war Dundee by showing, through statistical data and archival material, that it can be said of the city’s working women that they shared certain distinctive fea-

tures which can be contrived as women's politics.

From a theoretical perspective it was the chapter's findings that women's entry into part-time and low-paid work did not end with the jute era, and that they reinforced second-wave feminism's notion of determining "biological fate." The socialist feminist notion of capitalism's "reserve" work-force was found wanting, as was Anne Witz's view (1993, p276) that the ideology of domesticity "encouraged" women to regard "their primary role as that of wives and mothers." Women willingly took jobs in the electronics sector in Dundee - but regarded them "as jobs for life" as they had done in the jute industry. But from the 1950s onwards, their working environment was shared by male operatives and signs of male dominance and female subordination which was present in the mill heyday in terms of manager and worker, appeared increasingly across the electronics shop floor, with greater evidence of the segregation of the female workforce into low-paid, low-status jobs.

### **Concluding analysis**

The thesis considered questions and issues against a backdrop of important theoretical practice and analysis. While there is much recovery of women's experiences and inquiry into claims made about women's lives in the past in this thesis, the historical research was driven and influenced by debates within feminist theory and epistemological concerns underpinning women's lives.

The approach in this thesis was to explore whether the contested meanings of feminist theory were applicable within the context of Dundee, a so-called "women's town." Although the chapters set out Dundee's unique industrialisation and traced out the development of political activity in the city alone, the range of secondary sources and quantitative data analysed in Chapter One

kept in mind the ideological contribution of feminists and findings were set against these theoretical perspectives.

These secondary sources painted the historical progression of first- and second-wave feminism over a wide theoretical canvas. It was clear that some feminists regarded equality as a goal in itself, while others saw equality as a means to the goal of difference. As the thesis developed, it was illustrated that the equality and difference dichotomy should not represent mutually exclusive approaches in relation to Dundee. Not least in contributing to this conclusion was the remarkable diversity in political activity revealed by the first analysis of records of the Dundee branch of the Women Citizens' Association, which revealed widespread activity of a political nature.

A major area of the thesis focused on "women's expectations." Some writers (Pugh, 1992, p22, Witz, 1993, p274) consistently remark on the unchanging women's goals of work as a "temporary" interlude before marriage, and women being required to leave employment on marriage. Women in work also had expectations - exclusion from trade union organisation and antagonism from male colleagues, for instance. The evidence in Dundee revealed a contrasting picture of women in permanent work with no marriage bar and with a gradual willingness to engage trade unionism. Similarly, James and Bock (1992, p18) cite a common feminist position that childbirth "set women apart from politics and citizenship." This is a position which sits uncomfortably in Dundee's case. While the majority of the city's women were working women, there was no evidence that women remained at home after childbirth. Indeed, with high levels of male unemployment a traditional factor in the city's social norm was uniquely reversed and quite the opposite was the case. 1.

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1. To the extent that high child mortality figures in Dundee have brought (disputed) allegations of infanticide, notably from the local historian William Walker.



The movement of “patriarchy” from the private to the public sphere was also recorded in the thesis. Patriarchal relations and variations applied to the Dundee workforce and domestic life throughout the study period as it did to local populations elsewhere. But the acceptance by second-wave feminists that patriarchy moved into the public realm obscures evidence from Dundee that widespread workplace submission existed for a century before that perspective became popular. Thus the public form of patriarchy in Dundee took the form of material social relations and was grounded on economic subordination, implying a positive connection to Marxist theoretical scholarship. But it was the case in Dundee that low-paid, low-status jobs sustained patriarchy in the workplace, and that it was less likely oppression in the family dictated women’s work in the city.

As the analysis of community-conscious groups showed, however, patriarchy and close ties to feminist scholarship generally, had less of an impact on Dundee’s professional and middle-class women, who organised autonomously. While it may be viewed here as informal female power, it is more the case that their activities remained largely outside the purview of public policy at the time.

The thesis concludes that gender intervened in significant ways for women in the political arena in Dundee, when opportunities arose, while bearing in mind Martin Pugh’s finding (1992, p111) that “equal franchise was the most difficult of women’s issues.” It further concludes that while there is evidence to show that it had many unique features in terms of female occupation and social trends, it was not in terms of political activity that Dundee women were “different” - more that it was the city’s fascinating experience as a single industry, women-dominated town that made it unique.

A key finding, which contradicts many of the popular statements made about the role of Dundee’s working women, is that the momentum to participate in

political processes was almost entirely driven by the city's numerically insignificant female middle classes, who developed a strong belief that they had trasformatory potential in the political arena. Social commitment among community-conscious female networking groups was extensive and possible to validate empirically through contemporary primary material, such as the key evidence contained in the DWCA records. The solidarity and collective action of the DWCA could be considered "women's politics" at a time when much of the influential work carried out by branch members did not fall within conventional definitions of "political" activity.

The thesis concludes that although gender intervened in Dundee in a specific manner, its political history as far as working women were concerned was altogether rather typical. Without explaining numerically significant factors, such as the large numbers of women in Dundee's population and workforce, the research does not lead to a conclusion that working women formed "a defiant sisterhood" in political impact and outcome. Paradoxically, the notion that Dundee women are especially politically radical is more myth than fact. The thesis indicates, then, that published histories and documentaries about the daughters of Dundee create an unrealistic template with which to review their political achievements. It uses new evidence to challenge myths associated with the object of analysis, and in particular it contends that labelling Dundee's working women as militant - spawned in general terms from the jute era - and using this as a yardstick for subsequent political activity, does much to undermine important and genuine efforts at political participation by the city's numerically insignificant female middle classes, who demonstrated clear thinking on key issues such as representation and social welfare.

Thus this history of women's political activism in Dundee provides an original contribution to scholarly research and widens understanding of the similar and different experiences of women elsewhere. It adds both to the richness of understanding women's political lives as well as the danger of relying too

heavily on narrow theoretical perspectives, which seldom take account of time and place factors in a historically and socially-specific location.

That Scotland's fourth city proved typical of women's experiences elsewhere is adroitly summed up by the words of former Timex worker Ann Caird:

**"It is just the way Dundee is.  
The women tend to be the workers,  
but they are always told what to do."**

*(On The Line, 1996)*

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